



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07602527 3



NBC
M. C. H. H. H.
=



THE LOST NATION



AND BEYOND IS THE VALLEY OF THE DEVIL CITY

107m
7/6

THE LOST NATION

BY
EVERETT McNEIL



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HUGH SPENCER



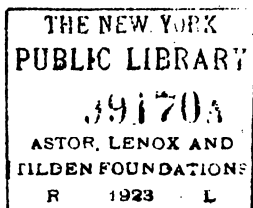
E. P. DUTTON & CO
NEW YORK



© 1915

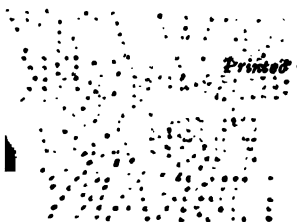
BY





Copyright 1918
By E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

All Rights Reserved



Printed in the United States of America

TO ALL
WHO ENJOY READING
A TALE OF UNUSUAL ADVENTURES
THIS STORY IS HOPEFULLY DEDICATED
BY THE AUTHOR





CHAPTER	PAGE
I. PROFESSOR THANE KENDAL	I
II. AN ADVENTURE IN MEXICO	9
III. THE SCALP-PULLERS	18
IV. A MYSTERY	33
V. A STRANGE COINCIDENCE	45
VI. A WEIRD MESSAGE	56
VII. CHIN CHINK	66
VIII. LORETTA	82
IX. IN MEXICO CITY	97
X. HOLY MIGUEL	109
XI. WAR BETWEEN AFRICA AND ASIA	120
XII. THE DEVIL MAN	135
XIII. A MIRACULOUS RESCUE	150
XIV. A NIGHT OF HORROR	167
XV. THE AVENUE OF GREAT OWLS	178
XVI. FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH	192
XVII. ITH	206
XVIII. IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH	218

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIX. THE SNAKE CAVERNS OF OOZE	231
XX. THE GREAT JAWS OF DEATH	239
XXI. BOOWHANG, THE BEAST	252
XXII. THE GREAT PYRAMID	265
XXIII. THE MASSACRE OF A NATION	279
XXIV. WARNINGS	292
XXV. A GREAT FIGHT	300
XXVI. THE FIGHT IN THE DOME BUILDING	309
XXVII. THE DEATH OF ITH	315
XXVIII. AT THE MERCY OF THE BALLOON	324

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

And Beyond is the Valley of the Devil City.....	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
The Bighorn was Coming Straight Down Toward the Place Where She Sat on Her Horse.....	163
The Journey Down this Awesome Avenue was Made Almost in Silence.....	189
They Looked into an Immense Cavern.....	225
So Great was the Weight and Strength of the Ape-men, that the Monsters were Able to Pull the Balloon Down Slowly.....	318

NOTE

The Principal Characters of this Story
also appear in

The Hermit of the Culebra Mountains

Or, The Adventures of Two Schoolboys
in the Far West

and

The Lost Treasure Cave

Or, Adventures with the Cowboys of
Colorado

by **EVERETT McNEIL**

THE LOST NATION



THE LOST NATION



PROFESSOR THANE KENDAL

“YAHARA!” yelled the brakeman, as he swung the car door open and the train came to a stop.

Professor Thane Kendal, absorbed in the book on ancient Mexico that he had been reading every moment since he boarded the train at Chicago, started violently at the sound of the name, jumped to his feet, hurriedly thrust the book into an open satchel on the seat by his side, caught up the satchel, grabbed his hat from the rack and rushed for the door. He was just in time; for, as his feet struck the heavy planks of the station platform, the conductor yelled, “ALL ABOARD!” waved his hand to the engineer and the train started on its way again.

The Professor stood for a moment looking curiously around. Then he set the satchel down on the station platform, thrust a hand into his inside

coat-pocket, pulled out a folded newspaper, opened it a fold, glanced at it, thrust the paper back into his pocket and turned to a young man standing near.

"Pardon me; but will you be so kind as to direct me to the home of Richard A. Orson?" he asked, a pleasant smile illuminating his face.

"I will do better than that," replied the young man eagerly. "I am going by his place and, if you will walk along with me, I will show you where he lives."

"Indeed, that is better; and I will be much obliged, if you will," and Professor Kendal picked up his satchel and signified that he was ready.

The two started off together, followed by the curious eyes of the little knot of idlers that always gathered at the Yahara railroad station to see the train come in.

Professor Kendal was a man to awaken interest and curiosity anywhere. He was unusually tall, being exactly six feet and four and a quarter inches in his stockinged feet, broad-shouldered, strong-limbed and splendidly proportioned from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. But, after the first glance of surprise and astonishment at his huge frame, the eyes always went to his face and remained there, held by something unusual and forceful. The face was somewhat long, square-jawed, firm-lipped, smooth-shaven and burnt by exposure to tropical suns until it was almost the hue of tanned leather. A heavy scar, showing white

against the bronze of his skin, ran from just above his left eye, across his forehead and disappeared under the thick black hair that thatched his head. The scar did not disfigure, rather it gave distinction to the face. The eyes were deep-set and dark, with a look in them that comes only to the eyes of men who have faced death often and bravely against great odds and under terrible circumstances. Altogether his was a face and form that would have attracted unwonted attention even on the crowded streets of a great city, where the unusual is seen almost every moment; and hence it is no wonder that the eyes of the simple villagers gathered at the station followed Professor Kendal, as he walked off with the obliging young man, with an absorbing curiosity and deep interest, while many were the wondering comments as to whom he might be and why he had come to Yahara and what he wanted to see Dick Orson for.

At the moment Professor Kendal left the Yahara station in search of Richard Orson, that young man entered his room, with his friend, Harry Ashton. Both boys showed considerable excitement; and the instant the door closed behind them, Dick pulled a letter out of his pocket, which both at once began eagerly to read.

"He says that he will follow this letter on the first train he can get out of Chicago," commented Dick, his eyes shining with excitement, as the two boys completed the reading of the letter. "That ought to bring him here on the next train from

Chicago. My, but wouldn't it be wonderful if he should have the other half of the broken cartouch of gold that we found so miraculously in the Treasure-Chamber of the Dead Kings!"*

"It would be more than wonderful, it would be miraculous!" responded Harry, his excitement showing in his face and eyes. "And he writes that he is sure he can read the inscription on the whole cartouch, if we only have the other half. What if it should tell of another treasure-chamber! Or reveal some great secret of those dead and gone kings! Let us have another look at the queer thing," and he turned eagerly to a small cupboard built in the wall of the room.

Dick at once drew a key from his pocket and, unlocking the cupboard, took out a small, quaintly carved, ebony casket. He placed the casket on the table and, unlocking it with a small gold key, threw back the cover and drew from its nest of soft velvet, the half of a broken cartouch of hammered gold, covered with mysterious-looking emblems and pictures. The cartouch originally had been oval in shape, with a richly ornamented border, and was some ten inches across its longest way and about an eighth of an inch thick. The break appeared to have been purposely made directly through the inscription, leaving a ragged sawlike edge.

"Well, it certainly was a queer find," averred

*This adventure of Dick and Harry, and others equally remarkable that led up to it, are fully narrated in the first two books of this series, "THE HERMIT OF THE CULEBRA MOUNTAINS" and "THE LOST TREASURE CAVE."

Harry, as the two boys stood eagerly examining the cartouch. "But it would be a whole lot queerer to have a man walk into this room with the other half of this cartouch that we know must have lain hidden in that cave for uncountable generations. Say, but we were in luck when that reporter from Chicago wrote up our story, if it should really be the means of bringing us the other half of the cartouch. But I'll wait to see it before I——"

A knock on the door interrupted Harry.

"Come in!" called Dick.

Bill Burke, Dick's negro servant, opened the door.

"A gemmen to see Massah Dick," he said, pop-eyed with excitement, while funny little kinks and wrinkles chased one another all around the corners of his mouth and eyes and up and down his cheeks and forehead in the most comical way, as they always did when Bill Burke was excited. "De most magnitudinous gemmen I ever done see."

Both boys started at the announcement of Bill Burke; and the eyes of each went quickly to the face of the other.

Could it be the Professor? Had he caught an earlier train than they expected?

"Show the gentleman in," and Dick turned to Bill Burke.

"Yes, sah," and Bill Burke vanished, closing the door behind him.

Dick laid the cartouch down on the table and turned excitedly to Harry.

"Now, if it is he and he has the other half of the cartouch, it will be the strangest thing that ever happened. I——"

Bill Burke swung the door open and the huge form of Professor Kendal stood framed in the doorway, a look of eager inquiry on his face.

"Richard Orson?" and he looked questioningly from the face of one boy to the face of the other.

"I am Richard Orson; and this is my friend, Harry Ashton," Dick replied.

"Glad to know both of you boys. I am Professor Thane Kendal," and, with a couple of strides Professor Kendal was in the room and gripping a hand of each boy. "I read about your remarkable adventures in a Chicago daily— You received my letter?" and the eyes of the Professor turned abruptly to Dick.

"Yes; and I can't tell you how much it surprised and interested me. If you really——"

Professor Kendal uttered an exclamation of astonishment and, with a quick stride, he was by the side of the table and examining the broken cartouch of gold, his face tense with excitement.

Dick and Harry stood as if transfixed, their eyes on the face of Professor Kendal.

Evidently Professor Kendal had forgotten their presence, where he was, everything but the piece of cartouch in his hand. For a moment he stood staring at the cartouch, as if he could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes, then, dropping it down on the table, he whirled about quickly, caught

up his satchel, which he had placed on the floor when he had grasped the hands of the boys, jerked it open, thrust a hand into it and pulled out a flat oblong object, carefully wrapped up in black velvet. With hands that trembled with excitement, he hurriedly unwrapped the velvet and exposed to the astounded eyes of Dick and Harry almost the exact replica of their broken cartouch of gold. In a moment more the Professor had fitted the two pieces together and stood staring down at them with the eyes of one who sees a glorious dream come true.

"Is it—is it the other half? Do they fit into each other?" and Dick, unable longer to control his excitement, hurried to the side of the Professor, followed by the equally excited Harry.

Professor Kendal started, like one suddenly awakened, brushed a hand swiftly across his eyes and turned to the two boys.

"Yes," he said, his voice trembling. "See," and he pointed to the table.

Dick and Harry looked and saw lying on the table the two pieces of the cartouch, now fitted together and forming a perfect whole. There could not be a shadow of a doubt, so perfectly did the broken ragged edges fit each into the other.

A feeling of awe crept into the hearts of both boys as they stood looking down on this relic of a forgotten civilization, with its graven message from out the tomb of a race so long dead that history had almost forgotten its existence.

What did it portend? Why had fate thus strangely picked them out as one of the instruments in bringing together, after so many ages of separation, the two pieces of the broken cartouch? And how came the other half in the possession of this giant of a man, with the face of one who has gone through many strange and desperate adventures?

For a full minute no one spoke. Each stood staring down at the cartouch, as if he would compel it to reveal the mystery of its existence. Then Dick lifted his eyes from the cartouch and turned to Professor Kendal.

"This is the most wonderful thing I ever heard of," he declared; "for you to come here bringing the other half of the broken cartouch that we found hidden in a cave, where it had lain for untold centuries. How did it come into your possession?"

For a moment Professor Kendal stood silent, his eyes fixed on the cartouch; then he slowly, as if it required a great effort, turned from the ancient relic to Dick.

"Yes," he said, "you boys have the right to know how my half of the broken cartouch came into my possession. But it will take some time to tell the story, so let us be seated," and the Professor pulled a chair up to the table, where he could sit with his eyes on the relic of ancient kings.

Dick and Harry quickly followed his example; and then turned eager eyes on the face of the Professor, ready for the promised story.



AN ADVENTURE IN MEXICO

“**W**HEN I was in college,” Professor Kendal began, after sitting in silent contemplation a moment, “I became deeply interested in those ancient races of Mexico, whose remains are the wonder and admiration of archeologists and historians to-day; and, when I left college, having inherited sufficient property to enable me to do as I pleased, I determined to devote my life to the study of the antiquities of Mexico and to the solving of the mystery of the origin of her remarkable peoples. That was twenty years ago; and from that day to this, I have never regretted my decision nor lost my enthusiasm,” and just a touch of pride came into the Professor’s tone and lighted his face.

“During these twenty years,” he continued, “I have made many trips to Mexico, sometimes going into wild and almost inaccessible regions never before visited by a white man, always in search of ancient cities, now in ruins, and other relics of those wonderful peoples and their civilization. Last year

I made one of the most remarkable of these explorations into a wildly mountainous and heretofore unexplored region of the state of Guerrero, inhabited by a tribe of the most savage and barbarous natives that I have ever met in all my wanderings in Mexico, who never before had heard of, much less seen, a white man.

"A very old and much wrinkled native Indian, who, I had heard, had had a wonderful and mysterious experience in his youth in the midst of the ruins of one of those ancient cities for which the state of Guerrero is famous, had been prevailed upon, after much urging and considerable largess, to reveal to me the whereabouts of these ancient ruins, which, he said, had never been visited by a white man and were shunned by all natives with superstitious dread.

"Do not seek to find it, señor,' he begged, as I was about to go; 'for of a surety it is the dwelling-place of devils. I, who have seen them, tell you.' He shuddered, as he spoke, and a dreadful look of awe and fear came on his face and into his sunken eyes and he crossed himself and began rapidly murmuring the names of saints.

"I tried to get him to tell me what had happened to him in the midst of those old ruins; but, with a look of shrinking horror and dreadful fear, as if their memories were too awful even to recall, he absolutely refused and continued to beg of me not to attempt to find those devil-ruins.

"I laughed and told him I had a potent charm,

before which all devils would shrivel up and disappear in little puffs of blue smoke.

" 'May the good God pardon that wicked laugh and me for telling you the way,' and the aged face showed the horror the devout and superstitious old man felt at my levity. 'Take back the coins. They would be accursed to me, if the devil-horrors should get you, to me who made the way known to you. Take them back, señor, and the shriveled, trembling hand that had been extended so greedily to receive them a moment before, was now thrust out to me, with the shining coins held on the open palm.

"I did not laugh this time. Indeed, I felt as if there must be some terrible experience back of the dread and horror of this shriveled old native, something his ignorance and superstition could not account for, and the many possibilities of what this might be aroused all my exploring and archeological instincts and determined me to attempt to find these old and mysterious ruins at once. I refused to take back the coins, telling the shriveled old bundle of bones and superstitions that they were powerless to harm him no matter what happened to me, and hurried away. With a cry of superstitious horror and fear, the old fellow jumped to his feet and hurled the coins after me, calling on a multitude of saints to witness that he returned the accursed coins that had tempted him and begging me not to venture within the boundaries of that devil-dwelling ruins, where even the Blessed Virgin would be powerless to save me.

"Six weeks later I and my native helpers were in the midst of the wildest and most desolate region of the unexplored portion of Guerrero, searching for the ruins of that ancient city, which the old Indian had told me were in a small valley hidden somewhere amongst these jagged and rock-torn mountains.

"One day, just as the sun was sinking behind the western mountain tops, we came to a narrow crack-like chasm in a great wall of rock. The entrance to this chasm was guarded by two huge stone tigers, crouching with bared fangs, one on each side; and its walls to the height of twenty or more feet had evidently been chiseled smooth by the hands of man. Half-effaced carvings, that I at once recognized as the picture-writing of the ancient Toltecs, covered the sides of the walls and the huge pedestals of the stone tigers. Above the entrance, held by the tips of its giant wings attached to each side of the chasm, hovered a monstrous bronze owl, modeled and carved with such nicety that even after all these ages the remains of perfectly cut feathers were to be seen covering the great breast. A hideously diabolical wisdom looked out of the great staring round eyes, made of two great rubies, in the down-stretched head and the huge talons still grasped the remains of a writhing serpent that had wound itself partly around one of the great legs.

"I at once recognized the place from the description given me by the old Indian and knew that I was near my journey end; for the chasm opened

into the hidden valley where lay the ruins of the Devil-City, according to the old fellow's words.

"Naturally I was greatly elated and wanted to push on into the valley at once; but not a step inside of the chasm would one of my superstitious native helpers take. In vain I implored, threatened, attempted to bribe. Not one of them could be driven or tempted to pass beneath that great down-looking owl, from whose jeweled eyes red rays of living light seemed to dart threateningly. They all stood huddled together, staring at the great bird, crossing themselves and murmuring rapidly the names of their favorite saints, so shaken by their superstitious fears that the teeth of some fairly chattered.

"'No, no, señor,' and Pedro, my head man, pointed a quivering hand at the great bronze bird. 'Do not ask us to pass under that evil thing. See the red devil that looks out of the great round eyes, looks out and watches. Rather you may kill us, for then our souls stay white. But not all the waters of Paradise could wash away their blackness, should the shadow of that evil thing once fall on us. And beyond is the Valley of the Devil-City! No, señor, we pass not under that evil thing and go not into the Valley of the Devil-City. We know, for our fathers have told us; and old Manuel, the devil-ridden, who did but enter the valley in his youth, we have seen and heard. May the good God and the Holy Virgin and all the saints protect us!' and, with his eyes still fixed on the baleful glare of the

great bird, he crossed himself and began rapidly muttering prayers.

"I knew the superstitious natives too well to waste more words. Besides the sun had now passed behind the western mountains and the darkness of night was rapidly approaching, and not even I cared to pass on into that unknown and evil-named valley in the darkness.

"A short distance away, yet within sight of the great owl and the stone tigers, a little stream of water ran along the bed of the narrow valley where we were.

"'You are fools,' I said. 'But we will talk no more of it to-night. Darkness will soon be here. Pitch the camp there,' and I pointed to where a little clump of trees grew on the bank of the stream. 'In the morning we will talk further.'

"My natives demurred. They wished to go where the red eyes of the great bird could not see them. But I would not listen and sternly bid them be men and pitch the camp where I bade them. They obeyed sullenly and with many fearful glances in the direction of the great owl and the stone tigers. I felt confident that they would not dare to desert me during the night; for I alone stood between them and the terrors of the unknown wilderness and the horrors conjured up by their superstitions.

"When out in the wilds, it is always my custom, when safety permits, to have two camp-fires made, a great fire for the men and a smaller one a little

distance away for myself; for I have ever found it wise to hold myself somewhat aloof from my helpers, especially when they are Mexicans. Around the great fire sleep the men, wrapped up in their heavy blankets; and in a small tent, pitched with the opening facing the smaller fire, I roll myself up in my blankets and usually sleep the sleep of a tired man. Two men, relieved every three hours, always stand guard during the night.

"On this night the great and the small fires were made and my tent pitched as usual; but, when it came time for the men to take to their blankets, Pedro, followed by the others, came to where I was sitting in front of my tent, dreaming of the possibilities the morrow had in store for me. It was evident that he and his men were still badly frightened, for all huddled close together and their eyes were continually darting fearful glances out into the surrounding darkness. There was no moon and the night in that deep mountain valley was inky black. The silence was ominous. Not one of the usual wilderness night sounds from beast or bird had been heard since the blackness of night had settled down over all. It seemed as if every living wild thing shunned this place at night. Pedro, hesitatingly, his hat held in his two hands, opened his mouth to speak—

"At that moment a weird nerve-quivering sound broke the silence, seemingly coming from directly over our heads.

"With cries of horror and fright, Pedro and his

men fell on their trembling knees and began chattering prayers and calling on the saints.

"The sudden abruptness of the sound, breaking into that deathlike stillness, had so startled me that I had sprung to my feet; but, by the time I was on my feet, I had recognized the sound as the unearthly night-cry of the Mexican screech-owl. The camp had been made under the low and wide-spreading branches of a number of large trees and, doubtless, the owl was perched on one of the limbs above our heads. In their nervous frightened condition the natives had been too terrified to recognize anything. I laughed a bit scornfully and turned to the prayer-chattering Pedro and his men. In turning I faced the chasm in the wall of rocks, invisible now on account of the darkness, but not more than a hundred yards from where we were encamped—and gave a violent, horrified start; for the great head of the bronze owl had suddenly glowed, as if filled with green fire, and red flames seemed to dart from the two round staring eyes. At the same moment the outstretched head lifted, the great beak opened and a shriek of such intensity and volume that it set the very marrow in my bones to quivering rang out.

"Pedro and the other natives yelled with terror and fell flat on their faces.

"For a moment I stood stunned by the dreadful spectacle, then, with a shock of horror, I realized that this must presage some terrible danger and thrust my hands swiftly to the butts of the heavy

revolvers in my belt. But I was too late; for even as my fingers closed around the deadly weapons, there came a deep hissing sound from the limbs above my head and the air seemed full of great black wings swooping down upon me and the groveling, terrified natives and the next instant I was struggling in the folds of something soft and featherlike. Then came a sweet, suffocating, overpowering scent—and nothingness.



CHAPTER III

THE SCALP-PULLERS

"WHEN my senses again returned, which must have been many hours later, I lay on the stone floor of a vast court, open to the sky, and surrounded by great ruined walls of stone masonry, which were covered with the picture-writing of the Toltecs. Even at that dread moment my pulse quickened at sight of the ruins and the inscriptions and for an instant I could see, think of nothing else. Then a sudden realization of what had happened recalled me to my more immediate surroundings and I lifted myself up on one elbow and looked around me.

"I lay at the foot of the ruins of a huge stone rostrum that nearly covered one end of the court; and a couple of paces back of me lay Pedro and his men. Our feet and hands were tightly bound. On the rostrum and immediately in the foreground squatted, on a magnificent feather-covered robe, a small, very fat, repulsive-looking savage, of a tribe I had never seen nor heard of before. Back of the Fat One stood a score of short thick-set savages, evidently the Fat One's private guard from the rude

weapons they carried. To the left of the Fat One, on another magnificent feathered robe, stood a wizened-faced beady-eyed old man, with the most diabolical look of fiendlike cruelty that I have ever seen on human face. His hair was shaved off close to his head, above a line passing around the head from the tip of one ear to the tip of the other ear. About his skinny form was wrapped another of those wondrous and beautiful feathered robes. In his left hand he held a long staff of some dark hard wood, rudely carved into the semblance of two intertwining serpents, and in his right he grasped the rude handle of a keen-bladed obsidian knife. He stood proudly, with a look of haughty obstinacy on his cruel face. It needed but a glance to tell that he was the high priest of some diabolical religion without sense or mercy. A pace back of the priest stood four naked, brutal-looking, big-muscled men, each holding in his right hand a piece of strong pliable rope some six feet long.

"May the good God preserve us, the Scalp-Pullers!" I heard Pedro groan from behind me.

"I shuddered and turned as best I could and saw, squatting and standing on the stone floor back of us, a couple of hundred or more of the most repulsive-looking savages I have ever seen of both sexes and of all ages. Nearly all their beady black eyes were fixed on us with an eager anticipatory light in them that sent the goose-flesh creeping up my back.

"Evidently I had regained my senses just in time to witness, nay, possibly, to take an unwilling part

in, some savage ceremony. Nor was I kept long in suspense as to what the ceremony was to be.

"From the first moment of my recovering consciousness, the beady black eyes of the priest had been fixed on my face. Apparently he was waiting for the effects of the drug, which I had doubtless breathed in, to vanish; for now, when I again turned my eyes to him, he stepped quickly forward down off the stone rostrum to where I lay and, bending over until his evil face was close to mine, looked intently into my eyes. Never had I felt so evil a look and, though I tried to meet it bravely and steadfastly, it was a blessed relief when he straightened up, with the evil light in his eyes shining, and faced the Fat One.

"'Eolah! Eolah! Eolah!' he called three times; and, at each call, he lifted the serpent staff high above his head and touched his forehead with the point of his obsidian knife.

"At the third call the Fat One stood up, turned to the score of soldiers back of him and made a peremptory gesture.

"Instantly the soldiers divided into two ranks, facing each other and separated by a couple of paces. The Fat One made another gesture. Down came the butts of the soldiers' heavy spears, with a crash on the stone floor, and down fell each soldier on one knee and, resting the elbow of the left arm on the upright knee, bowed his head on its palm, his right hand holding the spear upright, with its point inclined toward the point of the spear held



by the man opposite him, making a sort of archway of spears.

"A breathless hush now fell on all. This lasted perhaps a dozen seconds. Then came the crashing boom of a great skin-drum. All, even the Fat One, fell on their knees and bowed their heads to the floor. The priest alone remained erect, with his eyes on the archway of spears between the ranks of the soldiers.

"Silence had followed the boom of the great drum. Now came the distant chant of human voices to a wild weird tune. The voices came nearer. I struggled to my knees and looked across the rostrum, through the archway of spears, toward the chanting voices; and saw a strange procession slowly marching, to the chanting voices, from out a great doorway in the wall back of the rostrum, toward the archway of spears. First came two priests, or such I took them to be, robed in black, with hideously painted faces and their heads close-shaven above a line passing around the head from the tip of one ear to the tip of the other ear and painted white, even the forehead down to the eyes. The right hand of each priest held and swung a gold censer, from which issued clouds of smoking fragrant incense. Back of the priests came eight men, with their naked bodies painted black, circled with ghastly white stripes and with smooth-shaven white-topped heads similar to the priests. Between them, four on each side, they bore, on a strong rudely carved wooden platform,

a hideous image, sculptured out of black basalt, that I at once recognized as the ancient Aztec's war-god, Huitzilopochtli, which, evidently, they had appropriated for their own horrible worship.

"The image was about the size of a man, with the top of the head down to the eyebrows and the tops of the ears worn curiously smooth and polished and without hair or ornament, and stood on a small pedestal of black basalt. The dread war-god was clothed, as I am sure no other Aztec war-god had ever been clothed before, with a cloak and girdle the sight of which sent cold shivers of horror up and down my back and a chill to my heart; for the cloak was composed of human scalps, with the hair some four inches long, closely stitched together, and the girdle was made of rows of the same horrible material, only the hair on the girdle-scalps was a foot or more long.

" 'May the Holy Virgin and all the saints protect us! We are in the hands of the Scalp-Pullers!' again groaned Pedro, in a voice shivering with dread and deadly fear.

" 'Amen!' my heart echoed.

"Behind the war-god came twelve more men, with their bodies naked and painted a bright red, save the tops of their heads, which were smooth-shaven, and painted white, in the same manner as were the tops of the heads of the god-bearers and the priests. Between them, six on a side, they bore a smooth slab of black basalt, some six feet long by three feet wide and a foot thick, and four

heavy wooden standards on which to place the slab. The sides of the slab near the edge were pierced with holes an inch or so in diameter. After the slab-bearers came the chanters, a score of them, walking two and two and chanting their weird song as they walked. These were all old men, with long white hair and long straggling white beards. They were dressed in a long loose garment of spotless white and walked with a peculiar swaying motion that kept time to their rude chanting.

"Straight down under the archway of spears passed this strange procession, down until they came to the high priest, still standing erect and motionless. Here the god was lowered to the floor and the slab of basalt placed on its standards two paces in front of the god. The bearers, with abject obeisances to the god, backed away a dozen or more paces, then fell on their knees and bowed their heads to the floor. The two priests with the censers now placed their pots of smoking fragrance on the pedestal in front of the god and fell on their knees and bowed their heads to the floor. The white-robed chanters had fallen on their knees and bowed their heads to the floor where they had halted. Again only the high priest stood erect in all that assembly. The chanting ceased. Not a sound broke the deathlike stillness.

"CRASH! BANG! boomed the great skin drum.

"As if worked by one shaft of machinery, all arose upright and faced the god.

"The high priest turned to the four big-muscled

men standing back of him and gave a short, sharp command.

"A fiendish grin distorted the faces of the four, and they bowed and then strode straight toward the spot where we lay.

"I knew that the dread moment had come, that all that had preceded had been but ceremonious preliminaries to what was now to follow; and I nerved myself for the ordeal. My men were in a dreadful condition of fright. They had passed beyond ejaculations of horror and prayers and sat staring at the distorted features of the war-god in a sort of stupid fascination of terror and despair.

"The four men, with the ropes in their hands, came down the steps of the rostrum and stopping directly in front of where we sat, turned their hideous faces inquiringly to the high priest, who had advanced until he now stood not three paces away.

"Swiftly the eyes of the high priest swept over our forms; and then he pointed a bony finger at one of my shuddering Mexicans.

"With the quick spring of cats, the four men pounced upon the unfortunate fellow, seized him by the arms and the legs and bore him, paralyzed with terror, to the slab of basalt and laid him down on it on his back. Then swiftly, with hands that showed the skill of experience, they bound his arms and legs tightly to the slab with the strong ropes they held in their hands, passing the ropes through the holes in the edges of the slab and drawing them

so tight that it was not possible for the victim to move his body an inch. He now lay with his head toward the god and projecting some six inches over the edge of that end of the slab.

"God, it is dreadful to even speak of what followed!" and Professor Kendal wiped the perspiration that stood out on his forehead in cold drops off with his handkerchief. "And the thing, as I sit here safe in the United States, seems impossible. But, as I am a living man, the high priest now stepped to the foot of the god and, bowing his head three times before the horrible image, he whirled swiftly about, the obsidian knife in his right hand, stepped to the head of the victim bound to the slab, seized hold of the hair with his left hand and, with his right hand, swiftly made a complete circle with the keen point of his knife through the skin to the bone around the head just above the eyebrows and the tops of the ears. Then quickly two of the big-muscled men thrust their fingers under the cut scalp, one on each side of the head; and the three, the high priest holding to the hair, gave a sudden tremendous jerk, tearing the cut portion of the scalp loose from the skull; and the next instant the high priest had clapped it; warm and dripping blood, over the smooth skull of the god and pulled it down tight.

"Again the skin drum crashed and boomed; and, as with one voice, the savages yelled, drowning the scream of agony of the victim, who, the next instant, had become insensible from pain and horror.

"Now one of the four men thrust his two hands into an opening in one of the heavy supports of the slab and drew them out full of thick, viscous, tar-like substance and plastered it thickly over the bared skull of the victim. Then the four of them untied him from the slab and laid him down on the floor in front of the god.

"The high priest during this time had been bowing low before the horrible blood-stained visage of the god, calling to him in a high-pitched voice. Now, as the four men laid the insensible victim down before this Mexican Moloch, he suddenly reached up and pulled the still warm scalp from the skull and threw it down on the pedestal at the feet of the god.

"Again the great skin drum boomed out in one tremendous bang.

"Instantly every sound ceased and all stood silent and breathless, a horrible exultation and expectancy looking out of their glowing eyes.

"The high priest turned from the bloody god to the four big-muscled men and again gave the short sharp command. Again the fiendish grins distorted the features of the four men, as they bowed and strode straight toward the spot where we lay, holding the four ropes in their hands. Again the high priest pointed out his victim and again the four men pounced upon him and bore him, stupefied with terror, to the slab of basalt and tied him to it; and again the same horrible process

of scalp-pulling and worshipping that dreadful image was gone through with.

"Thus were all of my men hideously served, as I sat there on the stone floor of that ancient ruin, closing my eyes and shivering with horror at each dread climax and waiting my turn; for well I knew that I was being reserved for the grand climax of horrors and that in the end the high priest would point his bony finger at me and the big-muscled men pounce upon me, with the quick spring of cats.

"At last the scalp and the body of the last of my men were cast at the feet of that horrible image; and I knew that my time had come.

"It is beyond my power of words to depict the dread and horror I felt, when, at last, the bony finger was pointed at me and the four big-muscled men leaped toward me, with their catlike springs. But, when I saw them coming, a sudden rebellion against meekly submitting to such a fate, the way I had seen my men submit, like terrified lambs led to the slaughter, overwhelmed me and shot through every nerve and muscle of my body and I struggled with all my strength to break my bonds and die fighting, as it became a white man and an American. But my struggles were vain. The strong cords with which I was bound held; and the four big-muscled men seized and bore me, still struggling, to the fatal slab of black basalt and stretched me out on it on my back and in a trice had my legs and arms tightly bound to the slab, despite my utmost struggles.

"I am not afraid of death. But to die in that ignoble hideous way—sacrificed to a horribly grinning god of stone, filled my whole being with rage and horror. If I could only free myself! If I could feel the crash of my fist against that diabolically wrinkled face that I knew stood bowing and grimacing before that hideous god, knife in hand! If I could die, struck down in the heat and fierce turmoil of desperate battle! If I could have the satisfaction of struggling, even against overwhelming odds, until life left me! If only such a fate might be mine, then I was ready for death.

"Such were the thoughts that seethed through my brain during the brief moment that I lay stretched out and helpless on the stone of sacrifice. Then I felt the hand of the high priest gripping my hair and the point of the obsidian knife piercing to the bone of the skull and the sweep of it through the skin, as it began its circle of agony around my head—and I became mad, insane with rage, pain and horror!

"And I had a madman's strength.

"With one tremendous swelling surge and heave of body and muscles, I broke the ropes that bound my arms and legs; and the next thing I knew my fist had crashed into that fear-distorted, wrinkled old face and I had caught up the leathery old body by the two ankles and, swinging it around my head, had beat down the four big-muscled men even as they stood paralyzed with fear and horror and had thrown the body, with all my strength.

against the blood-stained image of the god. I heard the bones in the old body crunch and crack; and I knew that the wicked career of that evil man was ended. Even in that dreadful moment I felt satisfaction in knowing that I was the means of the ending. This good work done, I whirled about, leaped off the rostrum and sprang straight toward the heart of the terror-stricken savages that crowded the space in front of the rostrum, with a yell that sent sick fear to every heart.

“I am a large man, as you can see; but to the fear-distorted visions of those savages I must have seemed a veritable giant, as I bore down on them, whirling my arms and yelling like a madman, as, indeed, I was for the moment. With shrieks of fear they tumbled over one another to get out of my way and left a clear pathway through the huddled confusion of their ranks. I now saw a large opening in the wall at the far end of the room and ran toward it, sweeping the blood which flowed from the wound made by the priest with my hand, from my eyes as I ran. Behind me I heard the wild tumult of yelling men and shrieking women and children; and then came the swift thud, thud of feet on the hard stone floor and I knew that the chase was on. But I had little fear of being caught, knowing the speed and endurance of my long legs, provided there were no guards at the opening. Out through the opening I plunged, glancing swiftly to my right and to my left. There were no guards;

and I felt the thrill of one who has been suddenly and unexpectedly saved from a horrible death.

"I found myself in the midst of the ruins of what once must have been a great and populous city. Crumbling wall and pillars and towers of great buildings, now in ages-old ruins, were on all sides of me and straight ahead towered the tree-overgrown ruins of an enormous pyramid. Back of me I heard the yells of the pursuing savages; and, turning, saw them pouring out through the opening in the ruined wall, the score of soldiers in the lead. The sight of them drove all thoughts, save that of escape, from my head. At my right I saw the out-jutting corner of a ruined wall and sprang behind it, out of sight of my pursuers.

"In front of me ran a narrow alleylike way between two ruined walls. I had no time to choose and sped down this narrow way, glancing swiftly to the right and to the left, hoping to find some opening or turn in the walls through which or around which I might pass before the savages again caught sight of me. But I found none; and soon, far back behind me, I heard a great shout of rage and triumph; and knew that the pursuing savages had again spied their prey. At first I could not understand the meaning of the note of triumph sounded in their yells. Alas, I was soon to know. A little farther and the way turned gradually; and then, with abrupt suddenness, I found myself against a blank wall of cut marble that completely closed the way. I had unwittingly run into a blind

alley, a cul-de-sac, from which there appeared no escape, except back the way I had come, through that mass of charging savage rage, armed with spears and obsidian knives and clubs. The walls were too steep and smooth to climb and too high to jump and there was not the sign of an opening anywhere.

"So here was to be the end! Well, so let it be. I could at least die fighting. Swiftly my eyes searched everywhere for something I could use as a weapon. But in that narrow, stone-surrounded place there was nothing weaponlike, save fragments of stone that had fallen from the surrounding walls, not very effective weapons against sharp spears and long knives. Quickly I gathered in a little pile a number of the stones of the right size for throwing; and, standing with my back to the marble blocks that closed the passageway, I waited, a stone in each hand, for the onset of the savages.

"On they came, insane with rage and horror at the deadly sacrilege I had done their god and high priest, their knives in their hands and their spears held ready to throw or thrust. Two I struck down with hurled stones; and then they were upon me, yelling horribly. For an instant I beat them back with stones. But, in a moment, my hands were empty, and it seemed as if the obsidian points of a dozen spears were about to pierce my heart. Then, before the thrusts of the spears could reach me, the great block of marble in the wall against which I had set my back suddenly gave way and I fell

backward. At the same moment I felt two hands grasp me and pull me quickly backward and heard the grating sound of the great stone as it swung back into its place, shutting out the light and the roar of the savage mob outside.



A MYSTERY

“I FOUND myself in total darkness. Not an inch could I see before me. I could not imagine where I was, nor who he could be who had saved me. But my relief was so great to find myself safe, at least from those horrible savages, that, for the moment, I could realize little else. I could still feel the grip of the hands that had pulled me through the opening; and, a moment after the great block of marble had swung back into its place, I heard a pleasant, masculine voice speaking in some tongue unknown to me. At the same time an arm was slipped into mine and I was gently urged forward. A moment later my guide led me down a stairway for a dozen or more steps and on into a narrow stone-lined passageway. I could feel the damp stones at one side and above me, with my free hand. For a long distance we hurried on through this passageway, which was straight with a smooth bottom of stone.

“Once or twice I fancied that I felt the arm in

mine tremble. Soon I knew it was no fancy; for now my guide was leaning quite heavily on me, yet urging me forward more persistently than ever. A short distance farther and we came to a stairway leading upward. Up these stairs we passed; up, and up, and up, in pitchy blackness, until I began to fear my guide would fall with exhaustion before we reached the top and I slipped my arm around him and half-lifted him up every step.

"At last we came to the top and faced what felt to be a solid stone wall.

"My guide bent quickly forward; and, with a heavy sigh of relief and satisfaction, pressed his two hands against a certain portion of the wall. A great stone block swung slowly inward, making an opening some five feet high by three feet wide, through which poured the blessed daylight. At first the light blinded me; but, by the time we were through the opening, my eyes had begun to adjust themselves to the light and in a moment more I could see quite clearly again. My first look, one of deep curiosity and apprehension, was directed toward my guide.

"He stood a little in front of me, his eyes on my face. And, as I looked, I saw unspeakable wonder and reverence suddenly leap into his face and eyes; and he fell on his knees before me and bowed his head over my feet, crying out the word, 'Quetzalcoatl!' in a voice trembling with awe and wonder. And, even as the word trembled on his lips, he crumpled up and fell on his face to the floor.

"With an exclamation of horror I bent quickly over him, then shrank back; for I saw, sticking out between his shoulder blades, the rude handle of an obsidian knife.

"One of the Scalp-Pullers had reached him before the great block of marble swung shut; and the brave fellow had come all that distance and up that weary flight of stairs, without a murmur, terribly wounded. Again I bent over him; and, as gently as possible, pulled the knife from its bloody sheath and lifted the stricken form up in my arms. One glance at the still face and I knew that all earthly things were over with him, for good or for ill. He had given his life in saving mine. Gently I laid the body down on the stone floor and stood looking wonderingly down on it.

"Who could he have been? Whence had he come? The longer I looked, the greater became my wonder; for he had been no savage. And yet I could not place him with any race of human beings of whom I had knowledge. He was tall, nearly as tall as I am; but was much more finely proportioned; and there was a look of intelligence and refinement on his face, even in death, that indicated there had been many generations of culture and enlightenment back of him. He was dressed in a peculiar, but singularly appropriate outer garment, very much like a narrow elongated poncho, covered with graceful embroideries, especially around the head-hole and adown the bosom, made of some soft material, like silk, and

yet it was not silk, of a pale-blue color. A soft belt, with a jeweled buckle encircled the garment at the waist. Underneath were a soft white shirt and wide trousers of the same peculiar material. He carried no weapon of any kind. Suspended from his neck and hanging over his bosom was a richly embroidered and jeweled bag, apparently woven out of very fine threads of gold, semi-oval in shape and some eleven inches across its longest way. His hair, which was thick and black, fell straight down to his shoulders, where it was cut off squarely, and was held close to the head by a thin circlet of gold, adorned in the front with a single large ruby, finely cut and of a peculiarly rich brilliancy.

"Plainly he was no savage; but of a highly intelligent and cultured race. But of what race? And how came he there so opportunely in the midst of the ruins of that ancient city of the Toltecs? And how came he to know the mysteries of the secret passageway and the swinging marble blocks? I felt as if I had been on the verge of a wonderful discovery. If he had only lived, what marvels might he not have revealed to me? But he was dead; and with him had died the mystery of his being and of his presence there.

"For I know not how many minutes I stood entranced by the wonderful speculations that the presence of this mysterious being conjured up, all forgetful of my own perilous situation and the fact that I did not even know where I was. Then a sudden distant sound, that I at once recognized,

with a shock, as the beating of the great skin drum of the Scalp-Pullers, brought me out of my trance and to a full realization of my situation. I glanced swiftly around me.

"I stood in a vaulted stone chamber, without furnishings of any kind. The light came through openings in one end of the chamber and I hurried thither and looked out. Far below me lay the ruined Toltec city. At first I could not conceive where I could possibly be, a hundred and fifty or more feet above all my surroundings. Then I remembered the ruined pyramid that I had seen as I fled from the Scalp-Pullers and concluded that I must be in the interior of this pyramid, in a chamber somewhere near its top. A look straight down verified my conclusion. I could see the great base of the pyramid. Evidently I was safe from the Scalp-Pullers, at least for the present. But how get out of the pyramid? And, when out, how find my way, alone and unarmed, back to civilization?

"I hurried to the openings through which the light came, hoping that one of them might prove large enough to crawl through. But they were long, narrow slits, not over six inches wide at their outer opening and broadening to about a foot on the inside, between huge blocks of solid marble over four feet thick. No chance of squeezing my big body through one of them.

"My eyes swiftly searched the walls of the room for a passageway out. I could see none. The block of marble had swung shut behind us, as we had

entered the chamber; and so nicely did it fit that now I could not even tell where that opening was. The room was long and narrow and the far end lay in deep shadows. Possibly the shadows might conceal a way out. I hurried thither; and, to my delight, found a narrow doorlike opening, with stone steps leading downward into darkness, whither I knew not. I searched closely; but I could find no other opening; and, dreadful as was the thought of venturing into the blackness of that unknown passageway, it was less dreadful than the thought of remaining there, imprisoned with the dead man on the floor.

"Now, with the possibility, at least, of escape before me, my archeological instincts again got the better of me and drew me back to all that was left of that mysterious being who lay dead on the floor. The thought of him and of what might be back of him mystified, fascinated. Whence had he come? And why had he fallen on his knees before me, with that look of awe and reverence and supreme happiness on his face, even with the hand of death gripping at his heart? With a thrill of awe and wonder I recalled the one word, 'Quetzalcoatl,' he had uttered. Quetzalcoatl, that mystic, godlike hero of the ancient Toltecs, who, according to tradition, was a white man of a foreign race, with noble features and a long beard, a great tall man, who came to them mysteriously, taught them many things and, after twenty years, disappeared as mysteriously as he came, promising to return and again rule over

them. And from that day the Toltecs and the ancient peoples of Mexico had looked for the second coming of Quetzalcoatl, even as the Jews looked for the coming of the Messiah.

"Could it be possible that he had taken me for that god returning to his people? I was large and tall and had allowed my beard to grow long and I was a white man. The thought of any one taking me for a god made me smile? But, what else could his actions mean? His people! Could it be possible there was a remnant of the ancient Toltecs still living? Only an enthusiastic archeologist can understand how the thought thrilled me. If he had only lived! But he was dead; and here was I, somewhere in the interior of this great pyramid, surrounded by deadly enemies, certainly in no position to pursue the mystery longer; and reluctantly I bent over the body for a last look. My eyes caught sight of the jeweled bag suspended from his neck and now resting on his bosom. Possibly it might contain something that would throw light on the mystery. Very gently and carefully I lifted the head and slipped the gold chain, by which the bag was held, over it. There was no lock, only a gold catch of peculiar workmanship. For a moment the catch puzzled me. Then the catch let go and the bag sprang open; and I saw within it a flat oblong parcel very carefully wrapped in a wonderful cloth woven out of down. I drew the parcel out, it was very heavy for its size; and carefully unwrapped it.

"And my half of the broken cartouch of gold lay in my hands!

"I knew that I held an archeological treasure, a priceless relic of that shadowy past, even though evidently it was but half of the original, and determined to take it with me and, if I should get back again to civilization, see if I could not decipher its strange hieroglyphics; for I felt sure that it carried a message of importance from the grave of a long-dead civilization. I do not think this was robbing the dead, in any wrong sense, since I did not take the broken cartouch of gold from idle curiosity nor for financial gain. Accordingly I again carefully wrapped it in its wondrous cloth of down; and, replacing it in the bag, closed the bag and hung it around my neck, under my shirt, where it could not be seen and where it was less likely to take injury during the rough journey before me. I did not have the heart to remove the jeweled circlet from his brow, although the ruby was a wondrously fine one and of great value; but left it where it was. Now I was ready to leave the mysterious dead in his great stone tomb and to begin my venture into the darkness of that unknown passageway that led downward; and, with a last look at the face, king-like in the dread repose of death, I turned and hurried toward the dark opening.

"The stone stairs led straight downward, without any landings, through a narrow walled way. When I stretched out my two hands I could feel the walls of the two sides. I carried no light, I had

none to carry, not even a match, for everything had been taken out of my pockets by the Scalp-Pullers; and soon the darkness was absolute; and I was obliged to move very slowly and with the utmost caution. Death might be lurking at the end of each step. Down, constantly downward, I felt my way through the blackness, until I began to wonder if the stairs had any ending. To me, moving in that dread blackness and not knowing what horror another step might produce, it seemed hours before I came to the end of the stairs and felt my feet on a solid stone floor.

"I now, by moving about cautiously and feeling with my hands, found that I was still in a narrow stone-surrounded passageway, a little higher than my head and not over three feet wide, that seemed to run straight ahead. Stepping carefully and keeping a hand touching the wall each side of me, I began to move cautiously forward. The floor was smooth and hard; and I could have made rapid progress had I been certain there were no pitfalls in my way. But, in that inky blackness, I could not see an inch before me and caution bade me make sure of each step before I took it.

"How long I really was feeling my way through that narrow passage, I have no means of knowing. I soon lost all conscious reckoning of time. Hour after hour I know went by and still found me groping forward through the silent blackness.

"When would it end? Where would it end?

"I could feel that I was slowly mounting upward;

and I began to fear that I was moving in a dreadful series of circles, one above the other, inside the great pyramid, that would have no ending, at least for me. For I had not eaten food nor tasted water for a long time and a cruel hunger and thirst was gnawing at my stomach and at my throat; and a great weariness was seizing hold of my limbs and body; and a horrible fear of ending my life in this black hole was gripping my soul. Already I was staggering, stumbling to my knees; and only the 'horrible fear' drove my will to force me on. Blindly now, forgetful of all caution, I struggled forward, sometimes on my hands and knees, with my eyes staring wildly ahead in anxious quest of a ray of light that might tell me I was nearing the end of this hideous journey.

"And, suddenly, it came, a faint glow in the far distance!

"The blessed sight gave me strength and I sprang forward; and, a few minutes later, I was blinking in the bright sunlight, with the blessed air blowing freely all around me.

"For a time the glare of the sun blinded; but in a little while my eyes had readjusted themselves and I looked curiously around.

"I stood at the mouth of a cave near the rock-covered summit of a mountain. Below me, far in the distance, I could see the great pyramid and the ruined city; and, advancing straight from the pyramid toward the base of the mountain on which I stood, I saw the ruins of a great wall, many feet

wide and high; and knew that it had been through a passageway inside that wall and up the side of the mountain that I had made the terrible journey that had finally ended at the mouth of this small cave.

"In the cave I found a couple of wondrously soft and warm blankets and, what was more important, food and water in small gold vessels on a quaintly carved marble table. Evidently my unfortunate rescuer from the Scalp-Pullers had intended to return this way.

"I ate the food and drank the water; and then I stretched myself out on the blankets on the floor of the cave and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

"There is little more to tell. When I awoke my strength was completely restored; and the next day I was fortunate enough to find the great trail, leading from Acapulco, one of the most important seaports in Mexico, to the City of Mexico, where I fell in with a company bound for the capital, who supplied all my needs until I reached the city.

"I had lost everything I had with me in Mexico; and, consequently, I was obliged to return at once to the United States. But, before going, I made it a point to see President Diaz, who has always been most kind and courteous to me, and to tell him of the horrible Scalp-Pullers. Recently I learned that he had sent a punitive expedition against that accursed tribe and that the soldiers had destroyed them completely, root and branch.

"This is the first time I have told the story in all

of its details, because I feel as if I were on the verge of wonderful discoveries, and I do not wish some other archeologist or antiquarian to get scent of them and rob me of the honor the discoveries might bring me. Nor have I showed my half of the broken cartouch to any one else, because I did not care to tell how it came into my possession. But I feel as if you two boys have a right to know all; and I know I can trust you not to betray my confidence.

"That is how my piece of the broken cartouch came into my possession; and, incidentally, how I came in possession of this scar," and Professor Kendal touched the long white scar that ran from just above his left eye, across his forehead and disappeared under his hair. "The high priest made it with his obsidian knife."



CHAPTER V

A STRANGE COINCIDENCE

DICK and Harry, during this long recital, had listened with breathless interest, hardly making a motion or a sound, except startled exclamations of wonder and horror at certain points in the tale. They thought it the most wonderful story they had ever listened to and Professor Kendal the most remarkable man they had ever seen.

"And—and don't you expect to go back and explore that wonderful ruined city?" Dick exclaimed the moment he was sure the Professor had finished his tale, his face flushing and his eyes sparkling with excitement. "And find out where your mysterious rescuer came from? And whether or not the Toltec race, in some wonderful way, has really been prolonged to the present day? I shouldn't think you could rest until you found out those things," and Dick paused, abashed by his boldness.

"I most certainly do expect to go back," and Professor Kendal smiled at Dick's excitement. "I was almost ready to start, when I read in the papers of your remarkable discovery of the half of a broken

cartouch of gold, covered with strange hieroglyphics. That sent me hither as quickly as train could bring me, to see, if by any chance, it might be the other half of the broken cartouch of gold that had come into my possession so wonderfully. And, to my utter amazement, it has marvelously proven to be that very thing! Even now, with the evidence under my eyes, it hardly seems possible that it can be true, that, after all these unnumbered and forgotten ages, these two pieces of the broken cartouch, found under such different and remarkable circumstances, one in a cave in Colorado, where it evidently had lain hidden for centuries, and the other on the bosom of that mysterious man, left dead in the old Toltec pyramid in the wilds of Mexico, should be so strangely reunited in this little Wisconsin town. Almost it would seem as if some mysterious agency had brought them together."

"And you found your piece last summer; and we found our piece last summer! Do you remember the exact date?" Harry found difficulty in restraining his excitement.

"Yes," the Professor answered wonderingly. "It was on the ninth day of August and it must have been about nine o'clock in the morning, when I opened the bag of woven gold and took out my half of the broken cartouch, for I know it was early morning when we were brought before the Scalp-Pullers."

"And on that very day and, as nearly as I can

remember, on that very hour, Dick thrust his hand down into that old gold urn, that we found in the cave, and drew out our half of the broken cartouch!" There was awe and wonder in Harry's voice and his eyes turned half fearfully to the table where lay the cartouch of gold.

"A strange, a wondrously strange coincidence!" and a look of awe came on the Professor's face. "I know not how to explain it; but, from the moment my hands touched my part of the broken cartouch, I have felt as if, somehow, it was destined to play a very important part in my life, as if it had been placed there for a particular purpose; and the very remarkable happenings of to-day have strengthened that feeling. But," and the Professor smiled a bit wistfully, "it is useless to philosophize on such unaccountable happenings. Let us get back to understandable things. With your permission," and again the enthusiasm of the ardent archeologist flushed his face and lighted his eyes, "I will take your half of the cartouch, along with my half, back with me to my hotel; and there, in the quiet of my room, I will see if I can wrest the meaning out of these queer characters. I believe that I already have the key; and, now that I have the complete cartouch, I am most anxious to put it to the test. With your permission," and the Professor made a move to pick up the cartouch.

"No," and Dick jumped excitedly to his feet, "you must not go to a hotel, you must stay right here in my room. I will see that nothing disturbs

you; and, if you want anything, either Harry or I will be on hand to get it for you. All you will need to do to bring one of us, will be to give that bell-rope a jerk," and Dick pointed to where a bell-rope hung within handreach of the table. "You will stay here, won't you? You know we are almost as anxious as you are to know what is written on that cartouch; and I couldn't think of your going to a hotel. I want you to be my guest. Harry and I will go away at once and not come near you until you summon us. Oh, I do hope you can read what is written on that cartouch! You will stay, won't you?" and Dick's face pleaded even more eloquently than his words.

"I will; and thank you," Professor Kendal responded heartily. "Now clear out; and don't come near me, nor let any one else come near me, until I call you. Don't even bother me with food. Vamose!" and Professor Kendal turned, with the air of one who would not be bothered a moment longer, to the table on which lay the broken cartouch of gold.

Dick and Harry "vamosed" hurriedly and on their tiptoes; and went to Bill Burke's room, where was the bell which rang when the bell-rope in Dick's room was pulled, there to await developments.

The room was empty when they entered; but, a moment later, Bill Burke hurried in, a huge piece of mince pie, from which he had taken a great bite, in his hand and with his mouth chock-full of the pie. The moment he caught sight of the two boys, the

funny little wrinkles began jumping all over his face, as they always did when Bill Burke was excited; and he wildly attempted to swallow all the pie he had in his mouth at one great gulp, with the result that he choked until he became bl— white in the face.

Dick and Harry both jumped to his side and began pounding him vigorously on the back with one hand, while each made a grab for the pie with the other hand. Dick secured the pie; but, just as he was about to set his teeth in the luscious morsel, Bill Burke had a most violent spasm of choking; and his elbow flew up and hit Dick's elbow so violently that the pie went sailing out through an open window near which they were standing. The next moment Bill Burke straightened up, panting, his eyes streaming tears.

"Golly, I done thought fo' sho' my intestimals war a-comin' up dat time!" he panted, the moment he got back sufficient breath. "Whar am dat pie?" and his eyes rolled accusingly from the hands of Dick to the hands of Harry. "Gawd A'mighty, yo' ain't done swallowed it dat are quick!" and his eyes grew big with admiration. "Great Moses, but what wouldn't dis niggah done gib fo' a swallower like dat! Now," and the wrinkles on his face again began jumping with excitement, "who am dat scan'lous big gigantus ob a man I done took to see Massah Dick?"

"He?" responded Dick soberly. "He's a professional prize-fighter; and he wants to hire a man

to practise on, with a head so hard that he can hit it with all his strength without any danger of killing the man. He has heard of you; has come all the way from Chicago to see if you are the man he wants. We are going over to the gym. in a couple of hours to give him his first whack at your head," and Dick turned to Harry for confirmation.

"Yes," agreed Harry solemnly. "He says he can knock down a full-grown ox with one blow of his fist; and he thinks he can break your skull the first whack. We told him how you knocked down a huge grizzly bear out West with one blow of your head; and that made him more anxious than ever to have a whack at that thick skull of yours. He's willing to board and keep you and buy you ten cents worth of ice cream a day; and, if you are alive at the end of six months, he'll buy you a brand new suit of clothes and a gold-plated tooth-brush. Now he's oiling up the joints of his right arm and limbering up, so as to be ready for the try-out. We told him we thought you would jump at the offer."

"Hey!" and Bill Burke's eyes, that had been growing bigger and rounder during these remarks of Dick and Harry, almost popped out of his head, while the wrinkles on his black face twisted themselves into a most comical expression of mingled horror, fear and consternation. "Yo' done told dat prize-fittin' gemman, what knocks down oxes wid one blo' ob his fist, dat I's gwine to jump at de chance to gib him a whack at my head, hey? Yes, I's gwine to jump, I's sho' gwine to jump mighty

lively away from dat ox-killin' fist; an' if dat scan'lous, big, ondacious rapscallion comes triflin' 'round dis niggah, I's gwine to knock his osofegofus clean troo his spinal menegetus, 'deed I am, sho' as I's a born niggah," and Bill Burke, who once worked for a doctor, which explains his remarkable use of medical terms, wrinkled up his forehead and rolled his eyes and shook his head threateningly, like an angry ram.

Dick and Harry almost went into convulsions over the words and looks of Bill Burke and rocked and staggered about the room, drunk with laughter.

"You'll surely be the death of me yet, Bill Burke," Harry gasped, the moment he could get control of his tongue. "YOU are enough to make a wooden Indian sick with laughter."

"What!" and Bill Burke glared from the face of one boy to the face of the other. "What am yo' spillin' ober wid laugh like dat fo'?" and his face began to show a dawning comprehension that he had again been made the butt of one of the boys' jokes. "Yo' ain't done been foolin' me? 'Deed yo' hab, yo' scan'lous rapscallions! Well," and his face cleared into a generous grin, "I sho' am glad dat am a joke, fo' I'd a heap rathah be laughed at dan hab my head concussed. Now what am dat monstrosity ob a man har fo'?"

"He——" Dick stopped, suddenly and his eyes and face lit up with excitement and he turned quickly to Harry.

"Oh, Harry," he cried, "if Professor Kendal goes

back to Mexico to explore that ruined city and hunt for the Toltecs, we must go with him!"

"Yes," Harry agreed emphatically, his own face and eyes catching the excitement, "we certainly must go back with him; and we will, if he will let us. I have read a lot about the wonderful ruined cities of Mexico and the ancient Toltecs and Aztecs who built them; and I don't see how we could do anything more interesting and exciting than to explore the ruins of one of their cities, especially in the company of such a man as Professor Kendal. And the finding and the uniting of the two pieces of the cartouch in such wonderful ways almost looks as if—if Fate had selected us and Professor Kendal for some mysterious purpose that reaches way back to those ancient peoples. I don't see how anything so queer could have just happened. And if the Professor should be able to translate those queer marks on the cartouch; and if it should bid us go to Mexico and do something those ancient Toltecs wanted done and had been waiting all these centuries to have done, it would be too wonderful even for a story book."

"And I'd feel like a character in a story book— But, what's the use of dreaming over it? We can't know a blessed thing for sure, until we hear from the Professor. In the meantime, I move that Bill Burke go swipe another mince pie and bring it to us," and practical Dick turned to Bill Burke with a broad grin on his face.

The eyes of Bill Burke, during this conversa-

tion, had been rolling uncomprehendingly and wonderingly from the face of one boy to the face of the other. He was deeply mystified by their talk of ancient cities, of Toltecs and of Aztecs; but, at the insinuation as to how the pie came into his possession, a look of horror and outraged honesty jumped all over his black face and he turned indignantly on Dick.

"Yo' don't mean fo' to 'cuse me ob hookin' dat are pie, Massah Dick? 'Cause, if you' do', yo' wrong me scan'lous, 'deed yo' do. I nebber done took nuffin' in all my black life dat didn't belong to me. I seed dat pie a-settin' on de kitchen windo' sill; an' knowed to once dat de cook had done sot it dar fo' dis niggah, 'cause why it dar if not fo' me? A windo' sill ain't no pie shelf! So I jes' reach up an' slip dat pie off de plate; an' I had it 'most et up when I comed in har," and Bill Burke grinned triumphantly.

"I pity the wool on that black head of yours," laughed Dick, "if Bridget ever discovers that you took the pie; but, if you'll hook the other one that I know was alongside the one you took and bring it to us, I'll tell Bridget that Harry here was the thief," and Dick, with a grin turned to Harry. "Now Vamose; and don't come back, unless you bring the pie with you."

Bill Burke's grin widened, until it threatened to come together at the back of his head.

"It's gwine to get dat pie," he said, and, ducking

his head first to Dick, then to Harry, he whirled about and swiftly disappeared through the door.

Some five minutes later he reentered the room, a pie in each hand and the engulfing grin still on his face; and just one-quarter of a second later Dick was devouring one pie and Harry the other, while Bill Burke sat watching them, his eyes rolling from one devouring mouth to the other and his jaws working as if they were chewing pie, while the water fairly dripped from between his lips. At every mouthful he took, Dick joyously winked his right eye at Bill Burke and Harry his left eye; but neither boy made a move to offer the watering mouth a piece of the pie.

Suddenly, when each boy had about half finished his pie, the bell from Dick's room began jangling furiously.

All three jumped to their feet, Bill Burke's eyes rolling wildly and the funny little kinks and wrinkles chasing one another all over his face, while his mouth dropped wide open with astonishment. He did not know that there was any one in Dick's room and thought ghosts had hold of the bell-rope for sure.

"He wants us!" and Dick flung the remains of Ξ his pie at the wide-opened mouth of Bill Burke and shot out of the door.

"He's read the cartouch!" and Harry's pie followed Dick's, as he, too, rushed insanely out of the room.

Bill Burke saw the pieces of pie coming his way

and deftly caught one in each hand. For a moment he stood staring blankly and wonderingly after the two boys, then his eyes glanced down at the pie in his hands, his mouth opened widely and, solemnly winking, first with his right eye, then with his left, he dropped into a chair and gave his entire and exclusive attention to the pie.



CHAPTER VI

A WEIRD MESSAGE

WHEN Dick excitedly threw open the door of his room, he stopped, in amazement and not a little fear, on its threshold; for there in the middle of the floor was the dignified Professor Kendal, whirling about like a mad dervish and wildly swinging a piece of paper around his head with one of his long arms. At sight of Dick he made a leap for him; and, before the astonished and frightened boy could make a move, the great arms were around him and he was being whirled violently around in the mad dance. The next moment one of the long arms caught the astonished Harry and the three of them were doing a wild dance that threatened to precipitate them all through the floor down into the room below.

"I have it! I have it!" exultingly yelled the Professor, swinging the boys around more violently than ever. "I have done what no man ever did before. I have discovered the key to the writings of the ancient Toltecs. And it works! It works!"

Suddenly his eyes caught sight of the white, frightened faces of the two boys.

"Hi, ho!" he laughed, releasing Dick and Harry and dropping down into a chair. "You look as if you thought I had gone crazy-mad. Well, I am mad, mad with joy; for I have read the writing on the broken cartouch," and he held up the paper that he had been swinging around his head.

"Oh!" gasped both boys, "do tell us what it says."

"Of course it is difficult to translate such an ancient writing into modern English; but I am sure I have its meaning right," and the Professor became the sober earnest archeologist again. "It was evidently written, or caused to be written, by Topiltzin Acxitl, the last king of the Toltecs, after the final defeat of his armies and the overthrow of his nation, when, to escape the conquerors, he was about to flee from the royal city of Tollan, accompanied by a few of his most faithful followers. This would make the date somewhere near the year 1062, A. D. It is a queer document; and, judging from its purport, must have been prepared and sent forth on its strange mission at the bidding of one of the prophet-priests of the hero-god, Quetzalcoatl, to whose worship the apostate king had returned, but too late to save his people and his throne.

"The meaning of the writing," and a look of awe came into the Professor's eyes, "is very strange and mystifying, considering the remarkable way you came into possession of your half of the broken

cartouch of gold and even more wonderful manner I discovered mine. It would almost seem as if some unseen power, reaching back to that ages-old past, had guided us. I never——”

“Oh, do tell us what that queer writing means, now, at once; and leave the explaining until after,” Harry interrupted, unable longer to keep his impatience within bounds. “I——” He stopped abruptly, somewhat frightened by the temerity of his interruption.

“Pardon me,” and the Professor smiled. “I ought to have had more sense than to keep you boys so long in suspense. The meaning of the writing should have come first and the explaining afterward. But you shall have it now and at once,” and the Professor picked up the piece of paper that he had been waving around his head so excitedly, when the boys entered, and which he had dropped down on the table by the side of the cartouch, when he seated himself.

“I haven’t taken the time to put it into the best English,” he began, after a moment’s study of the paper; “but, as I have hastily written it out, the inscription of the cartouch reads:

“‘I, ACXITL, KING OF THE TOLTECS, FOR MY
MANY SINS AGAINST QUETZALCOATL, TRUE GOD
OF THE TOLTECS, JUSTLY DEPRIVED OF MY
PEOPLE AND MY THRONE BY GOD-SENT WAR, —
FAMINE AND PESTILENCE, AND ABOUT TO FLEE—
FROM THE WRATH OF THE CONQUEROR, HAVE—”

CAUSED, AT THE BIDDING OF THE HIGH PRIEST, QUAUHTLI, BELOVED OF THE GOD, THIS CARTOUCH TO BE MADE AND INSCRIBED WITH THE FATEFUL WORDS OF THE GOD.

“ ‘THUS COMMANDS THE LORD GOD QUETZALCOATL:

“ ‘MAKE A CARTOUCH OF FINE GOLD AND INSCRIBE THEREON THE FATE OF THE TOLTEC NATION. FOR THEIR MANY SINS AGAINST ME I WILL UTTERLY DESTROY THE PEOPLE OF TOLTEC, SAVE A CHOSEN FEW, WHO, LED BY MY PRIEST, QUAUHTLI, SHALL GO SOUTHWARD INTO THE VERY MIDST OF THE UNKNOWN MOUNTAINS, UNTIL THEY SHALL COME TO A VALLEY, WHEREIN THEY SHALL SEE, PERCHED ON THE STUMP OF A GREAT TREE, SPLINTERED AND RIVEN BY LIGHTNING, A HUGE OWL, WITH A WRITHING SERPENT IN HIS TALONS. AND THIS SHALL BE A SIGN THAT HERE THEY SHALL BUILD A NEW CITY AND A NEW TEMPLE, DEDICATED TO THE WORSHIP OF QUETZALCOATL FOREVER. AND ON THE DAY OF THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE, MY BELOVED PRIEST, QUAUHTLI, SHALL TAKE THE CARTOUCH OF GOLD, WHEREON THESE WORDS ARE WRITTEN, AND SHALL RAGGEDLY SEVER IT MIDWAY INTO HALVES; AND ONE OF THE HALVES HE SHALL PLACE IN THE HOLY OF HOLIES OF THE TEMPLE AND THE OTHER HALF SHALL HE GIVE TO THE MOST TRUSTWORTHY OF HIS PRIESTS, WHO SHALL GO WITH IT INTO THE FAR NORTH, EVEN TO THE

THE LOST NATION

GREAT CAVE OF CHITAXTL, WHEREIN ARE BURIED THE GREAT KINGS WHO RULED BEFORE THE FLOOD AND THE SOUTHWARD MIGRATION; AND THERE HE SHALL PLACE THE HALF OF THE CARTOUCH IN A GOLD URN, TOGETHER WITH OXITAL, THE EGG OF LIFE, AND SHALL SEAL THE URN WITH A DOUBLE SEAL.

“‘INTO THE BROKEN HALVES, THUS WIDELY SEPARATED, SHALL I BREATHE THE LIFE OF THE TOLTEC PEOPLE. SO LONG AS THE HALVES REMAIN SEPARATED, SO LONG SHALL THIS RACE OF TOLTECS LIVE. BUT, WHEN THE HALVES BECOME REUNITED, THEN SHALL COME THEIR END FOREVER.

“‘BUT, FOR MANY YEARS BEFORE THE COMING OF THE END, SHALL THEY FLOURISH IN THEIR NEW HOME AND BUILD A GREAT CITY AND BECOME WISE AND GLORIOUS. THEN, AS A SIGN, SHALL COME THE FIRST GREAT TROUBLE; BUT I SHALL OPEN THE MOUNTAINS AND GIVE MY PEOPLE A NEW HOME. AND HERE THEY SHALL BUILD A NEW CITY AND A NEW TEMPLE AND PROSPER AND GROW IN GLORY AND WISDOM, UNTIL THE COMING OF THE SECOND GREAT TROUBLE SHALL WARN THEM OF THE NEAR APPROACH OF THE END. THEN SHALL MY HIGH PRIEST TAKE THE HALF OF THE CARTOUCH FROM THE HOLY OF HOLIES IN THE TEMPLE AND SHALL GO WITH IT OUTSIDE THE RING OF MOUNTAINS AND THERE AWAIT MY COMING. FOR, OF A SURETY, WILL I COME BACK TO MY

PEOPLE ON THE GREAT DAY THAT SHALL SEE THE END OF THEIR ONCE MIGHTY RACE AND TAKE BACK WITH ME TO PARADISE THE SOULS OF ALL THE FAITHFUL; AND WITH ME, AS A SIGN THAT YOU MAY KNOW THAT I AM QUETZALCOATL, YOUR GOD, THOUGH IN THE FORM OF A MAN, WILL I BRING THE OTHER HALF OF THE CARTOUCH OF GOLD; AND THE FITTING TOGETHER OF THE HALVES SHALL BE TO YOU THE PROOF OF MY GODSHIP.

“‘THUS THE LORD GOD QUETZALCOATL WRITES THE FATE OF THE TOLTEC PEOPLE.’”

Professor Kendal ceased reading and laid down the paper on the table and a great and solemn soberness came on his face.

“If this is a true prophecy,” he said, speaking slowly and with a faraway look in his eyes, “then this day has seen the end of the last remnant of the Toltec race, when I, unknowingly, reunited the two pieces of the broken cartouch. If I had not found the unknown ruined Toltec city, if I had not met the strange being who rescued me from the Scalp-Pullers and discovered on his bosom the half of this cartouch and on the very day and hour that you discovered your half, if this strange being had not fallen on his knees in worship before me, with the word Quetzalcoatl on his dying lips, as if he had been there to await the coming of the god, as bidden by the cartouch—if it were not for all these strange and unaccountable happenings, I would smile with

knowing superiority at the absurd superstition of a nation that could put a religious faith in such a writing. Now, in the face of these unexplainable things, I know not what to think," and the dreamy faraway look on his face deepened.

Dick and Harry had listened to the reading of the inscription concerning the fate of a people supposed to be so long dead that traditions and ages-old ruins alone told of their existence, with feelings of wondering awe and amazement. Could it really be a message from out that long dead past? Was it possible that they and Professor Kendal had been influenced by some power outside of themselves to the finding and the uniting of the halves of the cartouch of gold? No, such things did not happen in this year of our Lord. And yet it certainly was very strange and very wonderful the way things had turned out. From which it will be seen that Dick and Harry, like Professor Kendal, did not know what to think of the queer happenings. And because of these very uncertainties and mystifications, both excited boys were loaded with questions and the moment Professor Kendal paused, they began firing them at him.

"Was the last king of the Toltecs really named Acxiti?" Dick shot in first.

"And did war, famine and pestilence really destroy the Toltec nation and the king flee southward, as told on the cartouch?" Harry followed.

"Do you really think that—" Dick began the

instant Harry ended; but was stopped abruptly by Professor Kendal.

"Halt!" he called in mock fear, throwing up both hands. "Shut off those Gatling guns. Their fire is getting too hot. Cool their jackets and wait until I get the questions already asked answered.

"You must know that there is no real history of the Toltec people, only traditions, the writings of the early Catholic priests and a few of the natives, who became educated after the Conquest, all more or less untrustworthy, and their own picture-writing, which, for the most part, no one has ever been able to translate. But all who have made a study of all that is known concerning this remarkable people, agree that the name of their last king was Acxítl, that he was driven from his throne and the nation destroyed by war, famine and pestilence, said to have been sent by the wrath of the gods, and that he fled, with a few of his chosen followers, southward, where he is lost in a number of conflicting traditions, so that no one knows just what became of him. The cartouch, then, agrees with what we know concerning the fate of the Toltecs; and there is no reason to doubt that it also gives the true purpose of the flight of the king southward. But, of course, I do not put much faith in the prophecies and the statement that the end of the Toltec race would not come until the separate halves of the cartouch were reunited; and yet it is difficult to account for the presence of my mysterious rescuer from the Scalp-Pullers, in the midst of

the ruins of that old Toltec city, in any other way than that he belonged to a remnant of that ancient people that still exists, hidden away in some mysterious manner, and that he was there awaiting the expected coming of the god, Quetzalcoatl, and that he took me for that god. But, what is the use of all this conjecturing? The thing to do is to go there and find out where he really came from; that is what I am going to do just as soon as possible. I shall start back for Chicago at once, and there complete my preparations for the expedition, and I should be on my way to Mexico in less than a week. I must get busy at once," and the Professor rose hastily to his feet, caught up his hat and satchel and was about to place the halves of the cartouch in the satchel, when he suddenly stopped, turned quickly to Dick and Harry, who had jumped to their feet in surprise and consternation, and now stood with mouths open ready to protest.

"Can you be ready to start for Mexico next Monday?" he demanded, as if there were no need of asking whether or not they wished to go, as, indeed, there was not.

"Yes!" "Yes!" cried both boys excitedly. "If necessary, we could be ready to start to-morrow."

"Then meet me in Chicago Monday morning at eight o'clock. Here is my address. Yes, and I had better telegraph those Colorado friends of yours to meet us in Vera Cruz, Mexico. I would like to have a number of white men with me; I am sure that I could not do better than to take

them. Remember, be at the address given you in Chicago at eight o'clock sharp, Monday morning. Then, until next Monday morning, good-by," and the Professor hastily wrapped up the cartouch, placed it in his satchel, shook hands with the boys—and was gone. Evidently he was a man of quick decisions.





CHIN CHINK

THE next few days were busy days for Dick and Harry and likewise for the excited Burke; but, by Monday morning, long telegrams had been sent to Captain Kent, Abel Johnson, and Cowboy Jim, the Colorado friends referred to by Professor Kendal, urging them to start at once for Vera Cruz on the greatest adventure of their lives, and the two boys, with everything packed and ready, were walking up the stone steps of the house in Chicago, at the address given them by Professor Kendal, just as the clock in a neighboring church steeple was striking the hour of eight. They wanted to show the Professor that he could depend on them, even to being on hand at the minute.

The door was opened by Professor Kendal himself, dressed ready for instant departure. Behind him stood an unusually large Chinaman, with bulging hand-bag in each hand and a look of mild interest on his phlegmatic countenance.

"Glad to know that I can depend on you boys

to the minute," and the Professor gripped the hand of each boy and shook it warmly. "Our train leaves in an hour, so we must go at once to the station. All my equipment is already there; and I see that you have yours on the cab in which you came, so our impedimenta will not delay us long. You will ride with me in my cab," and the Professor made a motion to the driver of a cab that had just driven to the curb a little in front of the one the boys came in; "and your man and my man can follow us in your cab. Boys," and the Professor turned to the Chinaman, "this is Chin Chink, my personal attendant and cook for the expedition. Chin Chink, this is Mr. Orson and Mr. Ashton, our fellow-travelers, and that black man is their man, Bill Burke, famous for his head-work. You and he will follow us in the second cab. Now we'll be off," and, with a word of instruction to the cab drivers, Professor Kendal and Dick and Harry hurried into their cab and were driven off.

Bill Burke had never seen a Chinaman before; and, for a moment, he stood rolling his eyes at Chin Chink, while the funny little kinks and wrinkles excitedly played tag with one another all over his face. The Chinaman regarded Bill Burke with equal curiosity. He had never seen a black face act like that before. At last he seemed to hit upon a satisfactory explanation of the queer looks on the black man's face.

"You sickee in bellee?" he inquired solicitously. "Velly bad! Velly bad! Alla samee you getee in

cabee 'long with me," and he nodded his head toward the second cab and started toward it with hand-bags.

"Nuffin' am de mattah wid my belly, yo' squi eyed, pig-tailed, yellah obnosity," and the offend Bill Burke drew himself up with a ludicrous assumption of dignity. "I's gwine to follah Mass Dick in mah cab; an', if yo' am comin' wid me, yo' bettah hop in mighty lively, 'cause I ain't gwine wait fo' no triflin' yellah bombosity like yo'," and Bill Burke strode to the cab and jumped in, with the conscious dignity of his one hundred and eighty-five pounds of black flesh.

Chin Chink followed; and the driver, with broad grin on his face, drove rapidly off after the first cab.

An hour later Professor Kendal and Dick and Harry sat together in a car that was speeding southward on its way to New Orleans, where they were to take a boat to Vera Cruz. And in a seat directly behind them sat Bill Burke and Chin Chink. Every now and then Bill Burke would roll his eyes sideways in the direction of Chin Chink; and Chin Chink, occasionally, would solemnly turn his eyes in their oblique orbits toward Bill Burke; but neither spoke a word and sat stiffly apart, in their seat, as if each had his suspicions of the other but, for the sakes of their masters, wished to keep the peace.

It was eight o'clock in the morning of the second day when, at last, the train entered the station

New Orleans and our friends detrained. Dick and Harry had never before been in New Orleans and, naturally, they hoped to have an opportunity to see some of the sights of the city before sailing for Mexico; but, the moment Professor Kendal stood on the floor of the station, he pulled out his watch and glanced anxiously at it.

"We have just two hours in which to get ourselves and our baggage on board the ship," he said, "which means that we have not a moment to spare and must get busy at once. Come on, we must see that our baggage is started for the boat at once," and he hurried off with Dick and Harry toward the baggage-room, followed by Bill Burke and Chin Chink, walking a little apart and still glancing suspiciously at each other.

Evidently, when Professor Kendal started in the direction of an object, he did not let anything, short of impossibilities, sidetrack or delay him.

By extraordinary efforts on the part of Professor Kendal, who seemed to know exactly what to do and the quickest way in which to do it, our friends found themselves, together with all of their impedimenta, on board the good ship, *La Belle*, bound for Vera Cruz, Mexico, exactly five minutes before the gang-plank was pulled in and the machinery began to shove the ship down the Mississippi toward the Gulf of Mexico.

On the day the boys left Yahara for Chicago they had received the following laconic telegram:

"WE WILL BE THERE. ARE
STARTING TO-DAY.

"CAPTAIN DAVID KENT

"ABEL JOHNSON

"COWBOY JIM."

And they had hoped that their Colorado friends would reach New Orleans in time to take the same boat to Vera Cruz that they did. Consequently they were considerably disappointed when they could not find them on board the *La Belle*. As near as they could figure it out, they ought to have reached New Orleans a few hours before they did.

"I hope we do not have to wait long for them at Vera Cruz," Harry said, as the two boys came on deck to take their last look at New Orleans, after having satisfied themselves that their friends were not on board.

"I second that wish most heartily," and Professor Kendal, who had come up just in time to hear Harry's remark, joined them. "I want to get out of Vera Cruz and on to a train for the City of Mexico, just as soon as we can get ourselves and our things off the boat. Now that I feel certain that there are great things in store for me in this ruined old Toltec city, everything that delays in getting there tries my patience sorely. I think I would take prison bars to hold me in Vera Cruz over twenty-four hours. But you need not worry about your friends. If they do not arrive before we leave Vera Cruz, we can leave word for the

to follow us to the City of Mexico, where we shall be for a number of days outfitting the expedition. By the way, now is a good time for you to tell me more about your Colorado friends; and you may begin with Captain Kent. Just what sort of a man is he?"

"Why—why," Harry began enthusiastically, "Captain Kent is one of the best scouts and Indian-fighters in all the West; but he is not at all like the dime-novel type of Indian-fighter, with long black hair falling in curls over his broad shoulders and athletic frame clothed in a fringed suit of tanned deerskin and belt full of bowie-knives and revolvers," and Harry smiled at the picture, so different from Captain Kent, that his mind had conjured up. "He is a quiet-appearing and peaceful-looking man, of medium height and stocky build, and looks more like a minister than he does like an Indian-fighter. Indeed, Dick and I the first time we saw him, took him for a minister, didn't we?" and Harry turned to Dick for confirmation.

"That we did," laughed Dick. "And he looked like a minister too. But you just ought to see him in action," and his face lit up. "He is great! You ought to have seen him, single-handed, face that mob, gone mad for blood, who were about to string up a train-robber. I expected they would kill him, too. But there was something in his eyes and the way he acted that brought the most blood-thirsty to his senses; and they allowed him to cut the rope and save the robber from hanging for the

law to deal with, without one of those blood-mad men trying to stop him."

"And you ought to have seen that great fight he had with Red Panther," broke in Harry, loath to let any one get the start of him in singing the praises of Captain Kent, "when, unarmed and surrounded by other Indians, he sprang upon that chief, yes and killed him with his own tomahawk. I don't believe there is another man in America who could have fought that fight and won it the way he did. But you would not think he was that kind of a man to look at him, that is you wouldn't, unless you looked close into his face and into his eyes. That is the sort of a man Captain Kent is!" and Harry turned his face, flushed with remembrances of the stirring times he had been recalling, to Professor Kendal.

"A man after my own heart, I should think from your description," smiled the Professor. "I am glad he is to be one of us. Now, what about this man Abel Johnson? Who and what is he?"

"Abel Johnson," replied Harry, "is a great shaggy-haired, rough-mannered rancher, with a heart as big as his body and the most charming daughter in Colorado. All of which I am sure Dick will confirm, especially the statement concerning the daughter."

"Indeed and I will," laughed Dick. "Abel Johnson is pure gold all through his big body; and Loretta—well, she is Loretta; and that is about as

high praise as a fellow can give any girl. I know you will like Abel Johnson."

"I am sure I will—and his daughter, too," grinned the Professor. "He, too, evidently is just the man I want. Now, what about this Cowboy Jim? I hope he is not one of those hell-roaring, whisky-drinking, trouble-making cow-punchers. If he is, I want none of him. I do not allow a drop of intoxicating liquors to be taken along on an expedition for whose safe return I am responsible. I want all my men to have all their faculties under control all the time."

Both boys laughed.

"Why Cowboy Jim," Dick responded, a little indignantly, "never drinks intoxicating liquors. He hates them, because the best friend he ever had was hanged for killing a man while he was drunk. He is a clean fearless man and one of the best horseback riders and ropers in all the West. I am sure you will make no mistake by taking Cowboy Jim along with us. And his horsemanship and his roping might come in handy."

"Well, I see I will have to pass him, too," and Professor Kendal laughed. "If they are all that you claim for them, they ought to make a trio that will be hard to beat; and their experience and skill might be very valuable to us; for no human being can tell what kinds of troubles we will have to face before this strange quest is accomplished. The more certain I become that we are on the verge of a wonderful discovery, one that will astonish the

archeological world and make this expedition famous the world over; and it may be that our adventures will be as remarkable as the promised results," and the Professor's face lit up and his eyes shone, as only the eyes of an enthusiast can. "Yes, I am glad that we are to have three such men as Captain Kent and Abel Johnson and Cowboy Jim with us; for, if a remnant of the ancient Toltec race still exists, and on that supposition only can I explain the presence of my mysterious rescuer from the Scalp-Pullers, then it must have surrounded itself with extraordinary precautions and, possibly, perils, in order to keep its existence so long hidden from the rest of the world; and the help of your brave and experienced friends may be of the greatest value in solving the mystery. But I do hope they will not delay us. The dread of someone making the discovery before I do is becoming almost unbearable. It would be a cruel quirk of fate to rob me of the prize now, just as I am about to stretch out my hand and grasp it; and I can hardly sleep nights from thinking of it. Well, well it is all on the knees of the gods; and I ought not to worry; but it really means so much to me that I feel as if I must not let slip the slightest possibility that might have in it the least likelihood of helping me on to success. That is why I am so very anxious not to lose a moment. The moment lost might be the moment that, unlost, would have won me success. And I am going to succeed, if success is humanly possible," and the jaws of Professor

Kendal came together tightly and his eyes glinted.

"I am sure you will succeed." There was strong conviction in Dick's voice; for it did not seem possible that a man like Professor Kendal could fail in anything. "And I know our friends will not delay you. They will be sure to come on the next boat; and, if necessary, can just as well meet us in the City of Mexico as in Vera Cruz."

"Yes, and if there is anything especially dangerous to be braved, where cool heads and quick wits are needed, they are exactly the kind of men to have with us," supplemented Harry. "Do you know," and he smiled up into the Professor's face, "I am becoming almost as excited as you are over this expedition. I dream every night of the most wonderful adventures in great ruined cities. Why, only last night I dreamed of getting lost in the dark passageways of a great pyramid; and of wandering blindly on, until, suddenly, I found myself in a great oval room, lit by thousands of gold lamps on a white shelf circling the room near the ceiling. At first I was all alone in the great room. Then, suddenly the walls slid upward, with a great banging noise like thunder, and a king, clothed all in spotless white, and followed by thousands of his subjects, men, women, children and little babies, entered the room; and the king sat down on a great white throne, that I now saw was near the center of the room; and the people gathered in a great mass all around him; and began to dance and sing most beautifully and harmoniously, while

the king stood up and bowed and smiled most divinely, turning to all sides. Then, suddenly, the light of the gold lamps changed to a frightful yellowish glare and a horrible chill swept through the air of the room and hundreds of giant apeline men leaped down from the shelf where the lamps had been and sprang upon the men, women, children and little babes, with dreadful howlings and shrieks. And I saw that the weird yellowish light that now lit the room came from the eyes of the apeline men. And, even as I looked on this dreadful scene, a sudden thick yellow smoke filled the room; and out of the smoke came crawling a pretty naked baby, gurgling and crowing; and in his right hand he held a writhing snake. Now the snake began to grow, until, suddenly, it broke from the baby's hand and, still growing, twisted itself around the pretty naked child and began to compress the tender form. Then I heard a dreadful scream; and a great owl, with eyes darting forth red fire, swooped swiftly downward and clutched the snake in his huge talons and tore its writhing folds from about the child and, with another dreadful scream, flapped his great wings and flew upward. And then I thought the baby looked smilingly up into my eyes and rose on his feet; and, as he stood up, he suddenly changed into a full-grown man, dressed and featured like the mysterious stranger you left dead in the Toltec pyramid; and the man reached forth and laid a hand on my head; and, as he did so, one of those horrible, giant, apeline men dropped from

the ceiling onto his back, crushing him to the floor. Then there came a confused whirling of weird, black, misshapen things before my eyes; and the next thing I knew I sat on a three-legged stool milking a yellow cow on top of the Toltec pyramid. The cow turned her head and looked at me out of yellow eyes, then she grinned widely, switched her tail violently in my face and gave a tremendous kick that knocked me off the top of the pyramid; and I rolled down its steep side, chased by a black imp, with red flames and yellow smoke shooting out of his mouth and ears, until I lit with an awful bang—and I woke up and found myself on the floor of the sleeping-car, with one of the pillows tightly clutched in my arms."

"Well, I should think it was time you woke up," and the Professor grinned at Harry. "Do you have such dreams often? If you do, you had better write them down and make a book out of them."

"But I really did have such a dream," insisted Harry, looking somewhat offended. "And Dick here knows that I fell out of my berth flat on my back on the floor of the car last night," and he turned to Dick for confirmation.

"You certainly did fall out of your berth," laughed Dick. "And you surely looked as if a black imp, spouting red fire and yellow smoke out of his eyes and ears, had been chasing you. I'll swear to that; but, as to the rest—— Well, if Professor Kendal had seen you downing mince pie and plum pudding at supper last night, I do not think he

would lay all of your dream to your vivid imagination. Anyway it was an interesting dream; and when you have another like it, I want to hear it Now," and Dick turned to Professor Kendal, his face sobering, "what makes you afraid someone might get the start of you and make this wonderful discovery first? No one else can possibly know what we know."

"True, true. There is no reason why I should feel so anxious. I suppose it is the bigness of the promised discovery that magnifies every possibility and makes me afraid that someone else might just happen to stumble upon it—— But, I have work to do in my cabin and here I am gossiping with you boys! Come down in about an hour. There are a number of things I want to talk over with you," and the Professor hurried away.

Dick and Harry remained on deck until the hour was up, their eyes never tiring of watching the sweep of the waters all around them. Then they adjourned to the cabin of Professor Kendal, where he talked over with them some uninteresting, but needed details of the expedition.

The next morning, when Dick and Harry went on board, they saw Bill Burke sitting all hunched up in a deck-chair near the railing, his elbows on his knees and his chin in his cupped hands, and looking as if he had just lost his last friend in the world. The boys nudged each other and grinned; for well they knew what it was that was troubling

Bill Burke. He did not look up as they drew near; but groaned most pitifully.

"Why, Bill Burke, what on earth is the matter with you?" and both boys sprang to his side and laid their hands solicitously on his shoulders.

"I's gwine to die! I's sho' gwine to die!" moaned Bill Burke.

"Rats!" scoffed Dick. "It is only a little belly ache. You have been eating too much."

"I told you that watermelon would make you sick, if you hogged it all," grinned Harry.

"O.Lordy! O Gawd A'mitah, my stomach am tryin' to jump up tro' mah essopigus! Keep it down, Massah Gawd, keep it down!" groaned Bill Burke. "I done know dat I's been a wicked niggah; but jes' forgib me dis time an' I'll nebber sin no mo'—— Gawd A'mitah, it am a-comin' ag'in!" and Bill Burke, with a look of agony on his face, shot out of his chair and rushed to the railing.

When he turned from the railing and staggered back to his chair, he looked as if he had parted with everything that he cherished in life.

"Dar," he groaned, as he slumped down into the chair, "de fishes am got de last ob dat watahmelon an' I hopes dey am satisfied," and he again humped himself up in his chair, with his chin in his cupped hands, and groaned dreadfully.

The boat now began to roll quite violently up and down with the swell of the waters. At the first sickening downward sweep, Bill Burke clutched both hands over his stomach and fell on his knees

and began to pray, like one who believes his last moment on earth is very near.

Dick and Harry both laughed. Boylike they could only see the ludicrous side of Bill Burke's suffering.

"I really think I'd laugh, if I knew Bill Burke was dying, his face is so unutterably comic in his misery."

"I am sure I would," grinned Dick. "But—but——" Dick hesitated and a queer, questioning look came on his face and a wild look into his eyes and one hand went involuntarily to his stomach.

At this moment the boat again made a downward sweep into a trough that followed a huge swell, with a sickening sensation of sinking.

A wild, agonized, desperate look leaped all over the face of Dick at the first sickening downward movement, and, with 'a despairing glance at Harry, comic even in its utter misery, he sprang for the rail and leaned over to feed the fish.

Harry started to grin, to say something funny; but the grin suddenly changed into a look of hurt astonishment and surprise, the words died in his mouth, a ghastly look came on his face; and, just as the boat reached the bottom of the trough and started up on the next swell, he threw all dignity to the winds and made a wild rush for the rail to join Dick in his fish feeding.

For some time neither boy dared leave the rail; but, when at last the worst was over and they turned

from the rail, it was to slump down groaning on the deck by the side of Bill Burke.

The negro boy lifted his head and rolled his eyes from one ghastly face to the other.

"Yo' been eatin' watahmelon, too?" he asked, a sickly grin on his face.

"Oh, shut up!" groaned Dick, struggling to his feet and staggering toward the companionway leading to his cabin. "I'm dying," and he disappeared down the stairway, clinging tightly to the railing and groaning at every step.

Harry followed him, crawling on his hands and knees, with a look of utter misery on his face.

Neither of the boys was seen on deck again until Vera Cruz was sighted many hours later. Then they came on deck, looking white and thin, but otherwise their energetic selves again, along with Professor Kendal; and a couple of paces behind them followed Bill Burke and Chin Chink, each loaded down with hand-baggage.

Dick and Harry were the first two passengers down the gang-plank, when, at last, the boat was in its berth and the passengers were allowed to leave the ship. As their feet touched the solid planks of the wharf, there was a glad cry and a girl darted from out the surrounding crowd of Mexicans; and the next thing Dick and Harry knew they were excitedly shaking the soft warm hands and looking into the glowing eyes of Loretta, Abel Johnson's charming daughter.



CHAPTER VIII

LORETTA

LORETTA JOHNSON was a girl to attract attention anywhere by her sweet, buoyant winsomeness. She had beautiful dark-brown hair, now confined in two thick long braids that fell to below her waist; her eyes were dark and sparkling; her cheeks clear and rosy with health and tanned a dark olive by exposure; and she had an oval face, with a little square aggressive chin and adorable lips that smiled joyously at the slightest provocation. Her form was as lithe and graceful as a fawn's and aglow with health and happiness. For a little over fifteen years she had lived in the world and every one of them had been passed in the wild, free untrammelled West, away from the artificial conventions of society and the falseness and hollowness of fashion.

Such was the girl who had rushed so uncere-
moniously and joyously upon the surprised Dick
and Harry the moment they stepped off the boat;
and I am sure no one will blame the boys for the
warmth and gladness with which they greeted her;
as they continued to shake her hands and to ex-
press their surprise and pleasure at her being there.
In the midst of it all a large, shaggy-haired and

bearded man pushed his way through the curious crowd, that by now were pressing close around the three children, and to the side of the two boys.

"There, now, don't be hoggish, little gal. Give your old dad a chance," and Abel Johnson, his merry blue eyes twinkling, very gently but firmly shoved Loretta a little to one side and tightly gripped a hand of each boy in each of his two big fists and shook them until he threatened to dis-joint them, while he told the boys how glad he was to see them again.

The next moment Captain Kent had them by their hands; and, a moment later, Cowboy Jim was declaring: "Suffering centipedes, but I'm some joyous to see you two boys again?" while he shook their hands and slapped them on their backs.

In the excitement of the moment Dick and Harry both absolutely forgot the presence of Professor Kendal; and it was not until his huge frame towered up in front of them that they remembered him and the fact that he did not know their Colorado friends. Introductions quickly followed, even to that of Chin Chink; and soon all were talking together as only old friends can talk, when they meet after long separation.

In the midst of the excitement and talk, Loretta caught sight of Bill Burke, and the next moment she was shaking him warmly by the hand and declaring that she was overjoyed to see his happy Countenance again.

"I's pow'ful glad to see yo' ag'in, Mis' 'Retta,"

and Bill Burke smiled all over his black face. "Yo' am certainly lookin' scrumptuous, like yo' always does, only dar am mo' scrumptosity to yo'r looks right now dan I ebber done seed befo'."

"There, there, Bill Burke. I see you are the same old flatterer," and, with a laugh, Loretta whirled about and hurried back to where Dick and Harry stood talking with her father and Cowboy Jim.

At this moment Professor Kendal abruptly took out his watch and glanced at it; and a look of anxiety came on his face.

"Men and lady," he said, with a smile and a bow to Loretta, "the next train to the City of Mexico leaves in one hour and there will not be another train going that way until twenty-four hours later. We are going on the next train, so we must cut this delightful talk short and get busy at once or we will never make it. I know these Mexicans and it is almost impossible to make one of them hurry; but I'll do my best to inject a little life into them and see that they get our baggage over to the train station in time. Captain Kent and Bill Burke and Chin Chink will come with me. The rest of you will take the 'bus,' go to the station and there await our coming."

Professor Kendal beckoned and called to the driver of an odd-looking vehicle standing nearby.

The driver indolently straightened up, gathered up the lines to the one-eared mule and the skeleton of a white horse that comprised his team; and, by

swearing at them fluently in vulgar Spanish and flicking them with his long-lashed whip, managed to drive them up and bring them to a halt near the spot where our friends stood.

"In with you," grinned the Professor, as our friends hesitated to board the odd craft. "I know Pablo and his rig and will guarantee that he will get you to the station in time to take the train, if you will see that neither the driver nor the animals go to sleep. The station is only about a mile from here. Put the hand-bags in the 'bus,'" and he turned to Bill Burke and Chin Chink, "and come with me. We must see to getting all of our baggage off the boat at once. Come on Captain," and he and Captain Kent hurried back on the boat.

Bill Burke and Chin Chink tossed their hang-bags into the "bus" and followed Professor Kendal and Captain Kent.

A moment later and Loretta and her father and Cowboy Jim and Dick and Harry were seated in the "bus"; and, with many a complaining squeak at its unusual load, the odd vehicle got slowly underway.

Pablo, true to Professor Kendal's guarantee, landed them all safe and sound in the station, without either he or his horse going to sleep once. Cowboy Jim, who sat on the seat by his side, saw to that.

"Now," and Loretta, the moment they were seated in the station waiting-room, turned to Dick and Harry, who had seated themselves, one on each

side of her, "tell me about Professor Kendal. He is the most interesting-looking man I ever saw. He looks as if he had had some terrible experiences. And, my, what a big man he is! Why, he is bigger than dad! Tell me about him."

"I second that demand most emphatic," broke in Cowboy Jim, as he dropped into the seat by the side of Dick. "He's a whale of a man and he looks as if he had had a whale of an experience. How did you rope him, boys?"

"We—we didn't rope him, he ropes us," laughed Harry. "He— Oh, it is almost too wonderful to believe! He has the other half of that broken cartouch of gold that Dick found in the sealed gold urn that we discovered in that mysterious cave in Colorado; and he has put the halves together and has translated the writing on them into English; and it tells of the last king of the Toltecs and the ruin of the nation by war, famine and pestilence; and how a remnant of the people, under the leadership of a priest, was directed by their god to go southward into a wilderness of mountains and there build another city. And, when this had been done, the priest was bidden by the god to take the cartouch of gold, which the god had instructed him to make, and sever it into halves; and to send one of the halves into the far north to a cave wherein were buried the kings who ruled before the flood and the great migration southward, and place it in a gold urn and leave it there. And the god promised that, as long as the halves of the cartouch remained

separated, so long would this race of Toltecs live; but that the end of the race would come the moment the halves were reunited."

"And Professor Kendal," broke in Dick unable longer to keep silent, "has made the most wonderful discovery of the ruins of a great Toltec city in a part of Mexico never before visited by a white man; and he believes that this is the ruins of the city spoken of on the cartouch and that a remnant of the Toltecs still exists hidden away in some almost inaccessible mountain valley near where he found the ruins. He discovered his half of the cartouch there and had the most terrible experience I ever heard of happening to any man."

"And," interrupted Harry, eager to do his part in the telling, "his life was saved in a wonderful manner by a mysterious man, who lost his life in saving his; and he found the half of the cartouch on the body of this man; and he believes that this man was a Toltec, one of the last of his race— But, you must hear Professor Kendal himself tell the story of his dreadful adventure in the ruins of the old Toltec city. No one else could tell it as vividly as he does. He has organized this expedition to explore the ruins of that old Toltec city and to find out for sure whether or not any of the Toltecs still exist. He has made a special study of the ancient races of Mexico and will explain to you what a really wonderful adventure this promises to be. Think of discovering an unknown race of human beings, possibly living in a great city and having a

civilization developed all by themselves! Dick and I thought that you would not want to miss this adventure, especially since you helped in starting it on its way, when you aided us in the discovery of the gold urn in the Cave of the Dead Kings."

"And you were right," declared Abel Johnson emphatically. "We sure do want to see this adventure through."

"To the very end of the cow's tail," agreed Cowboy Jim, with equal emphasis. "But them there Toltecs have me guessing some. I never heard tell of no tribe of Greasers by that name before," and he turned a puzzled face to Harry.

"The Toltecs," explained Harry, "were a semi-civilized race of people that lived in Mexico long before it was conquered by the Spaniards; for their great cities were heaps of ruins and the people themselves had utterly disappeared when the Spaniards came. They were probably a powerful nation long before Columbus discovered America."

"They sure was some ancient," grinned Cowboy Jim. "But, I reckon, they must have hog-tied and took all their civilization with them; for I never knowed a modern Greaser that acted as if he had been within roping distance of real white civilization for a thousand generations. I sure would like to see a live civilized Mexican!" Cowboy Jim had the Western cowpuncher's usual contempt for all things Mexican.

"Does Professor Kendal really think that the Toltecs still exist and that we can find them?"

and Loretta's eyes glowed with excitement. "It would be truly wonderful, if we did. Anyway it will be great just to explore the unknown ruined city; and we might find another treasure-chamber, filled with gold and jewels and things. But," and without waiting for her questions to be answered, she turned impatiently to Harry, "do tell us now about that terrible adventure Professor Kendal had in the ruined city. I don't want to wait until the Professor has time to tell it. I want to hear it now. I know it must be exciting."

"It is more than exciting," Harry replied grimly. "It is terribly and horribly thrilling; but it is the Professor's story and you will have to wait for him to tell it. I hope that nothing like it happens to any of us," and Harry shuddered, even at the remote possibility of being called upon to face the dreadful Scalp-Pullers.

"I think you are real mean," Loretta pouted, "to excite our interest in a story this way and then refuse to tell it. I——" She stopped abruptly; for, at that moment, a hullabaloo of excited angry voices broke out just outside of the station window; and Loretta, followed by the others, hurried to the window to see what was the trouble.

The window opened on a narrow street, filled with the usual Mexican street traffic; and, almost directly under the window, a Mexican driver was unmercifully beating a small horse, hitched to a large two-wheeled cart, on which was a great load of wood. The wheels of the cart had stuck in a

mud-hole; and the lazy driver stood on the foot-board in front of his seat raining blows, with an ugly-looking whip, on the back and sides of the horse, at the same time yelling and cursing in Spanish at the top of his voice. The horse was making desperate efforts to pull the wheels out of the mud-hole; but, evidently, the effort required was beyond his strength. Around the brutal driver and his horse a crowd of Mexicans, men, women and children, had gathered; and their excited cries, not one of which was raised in pity of the horse or condemnation of the driver, swelled the terrific hullabaloo made by the driver, until it sounded to the ears of our astonished friends like the roar of a rioting mob. The driver, now giving free rein to his vile temper, jumped off the cart and began alternately kicking and beating the poor horse.

Loretta had been born and brought up on a great Western ranch, where a man's best friend is his horse. Moreover she had a very tender heart, that could not abide the sight of suffering in man or beast without attempting to alleviate it. And now, when she saw the brutal driver leap off his cart and begin kicking the little horse, for not doing what was clearly beyond his power to do, she forgot everything in her indignation but the suffering horse; and, with a little cry of rage, she darted from the window and out the door, before a hand could stay her; and the next moment she had caught the driver by the arm and in good plain

Western English was telling him what she thought of him and his brutality.

The driver at first was so astonished at this interference by a gringo girl, with his divine right to beat or kick his own horse as his pleasure or wrath dictated, that he stopped short in his swearing and kicking the horse and stared blankly at Loretta for a moment. Then a jeering cry and laugh from the crowd around them sent the anger flaming back into his brain and, with a curse, he roughly shook Loretta's hand from his arm and turned more furiously than ever on the horse and began beating him over the head with the heavy butt of the stock of his whip. What mattered Loretta's wrath to him! She was only a despised gringo girl, too weak and small to do him any harm; and he would show her and the crowd around them that he was man enough to beat his own horse as much as he pleased, in spite of all the gringo girls in the great U. S. A. But, unfortunately for him, he did not know the temper of the little American girl.

Two blows he struck; but, as his arm was raised for the third blow, Loretta sprang, like an enraged wildcat, upon his arm; and, so vehement and unexpected was her attack, that she bore his arm down and tore the whip from his hand. Then, leaping back a couple of paces, she swung the whip above her head and brought its cutting lash down, with all her strength, around the legs of the Mexican.

The Mexican jumped and yelled with pain and rage; and then, with a horrible string of Mexican curses, he sprang upon Loretta, jerked the whip from her hand and swung it above his head, his eyes blood-shot with rage.

But, before the blow could fall on the girl's tender flesh, there was a roar of rage; and the next thing the Mexican knew a fist struck him alongside the jaw, lifting him off his feet and hurling him to the ground, where he lay still for a moment; and the big arms of Abel Johnson were around his "little gal."

The Mexican now began slowly raising himself from the ground, his right hand going quickly to his belt and drawing a long-bladed, ugly-looking knife, while his eyes, inflamed with rage, fixed themselves on Abel Johnson, who now stood, with Loretta in his arms, his back to the Mexican, all unmindful of his danger. The Mexican, rage-blinded, could see only Abel Johnson, the gringo whose fist had nearly broken his jaw, and he stood with his back to him!

Suddenly the Mexican leaped to his feet, the knife in his upraised hand—and found himself looking into the long barrel of Cowboy's Jim's six-shooter, and back of the barrel Cowboy Jim's determined eyes, now with a deadly light in them.

"Drop that bloodletter and vamose sudden," and Cowboy Jim took a quick step toward the Mexican, keeping the barrel of his six-shooter leveled at his head.

A sickly yellow pallor came over the face of the Mexican, the knife dropped from his hand, he took a quick step, almost a jump, backward, whirled about and dove into the crowd.

Cowboy Jim grinned and slipped his six-shooter back into its holster, which he wore hidden under his coat.

The crowd of surrounding Mexicans showed anger and hooted and yelled at the gringos; but, awed by the prestige of American courage and skill with the deadly six-shooter, they dared make no threatening move against them.

For a moment Cowboy Jim, with Dick and Harry standing one on each side of him, stood facing the crowd of angry Mexicans, then Cowboy Jim laughed.

"They are just like a herd of yelping curs, all bark and no bite, when a feller's face is to them. Come on," and he turned his back contemptuously on the angry crowd of Mexicans and started toward the door of the station, through which at that moment Abel Johnson was leading Loretta.

Dick and Harry, with equal contempt and bravado, promptly turned their backs on the Mexicans and kept their places at the sides of Cowboy Jim, as he strode toward the door of the station.

During these few moments the anger of the crowd against the gringos had been growing; and now, at the scornful turning of their backs, as if the Mexicans were too cowardly even to be feared, it suddenly burst bounds and, with a wolfish growl

of rage, the mob, which had pressed close behind the contemptuous backs of Cowboy Jim and Dick and Harry, hurled itself upon them. So close were they and so sudden and unexpected was the attack, that, before Cowboy Jim or Dick or Harry could turn or draw a weapon a dozen clubs and knives were threatening their lives. But, before a club fell or a knife struck, there came a sudden great commotion in the rear and the giant form of Professor Kendal, hurling Mexicans aside, as a ball hurls ninepins, and angrily shouting orders in Spanish, plowed its way through the crowd and to the side of our endangered friends.

The Mexicans, at sight of the huge frame of the angry Professor, instantly lowered their weapons and sullenly slunk away, like whipped curs at the sound of their master's angry voice.

Evidently the people of Vera Cruz knew and feared Professor Kendal.

"Into the station with you," and Professor Kendal half shoved the astonished cowpuncher and the two boys before him through the open door into the station and closed the door behind him.

"Now tell me what caused this trouble," and his eyes turned sternly to the face of Cowboy Jim.

"There's the cause," and, with a grin, Cowboy Jim pointed to Loretta. "She won't stand for the abusing of a horse; and when a Greaser started in to wallop the life out of a little horse that got stuck in a mud-hole in front of the station, that little American girl started for him her war-paint

all on; and, when he wouldn't heed her warning to quit and started to pound the horse over the head with the stock of his whip, she actually took the whip away from him and wound its lash once around his own legs, before the brute sprang upon her and tore it from her hands, and then, wild with rage, swung it above his head and was about to strike her with it, when, naturally, the fist of her dad hit him on the jaw and he collapsed sudden. This riled the Greaser some considerable; and, when he sprang to his feet, he had a knife in his hand, so I, naturally, pulled my six-shooter and told him to vamose sudden, which he did, diving into the crowd like a scart frog into a mud-puddle. Then we turned our backs contemptuous like on the crowd and started for the station. This must have riled the mob some more; for the next thing we knew the pack of curs jumped our backs. But, before any damage could be done, you galloped up and stampeded the whole herd. Say," and a grin spread over Cowboy Jim's features, "what was them magic words you yelled that sent them mad Greasers scurrying for their holes, like a lot of prairie dogs at sight of a man with a gun? They're sure strong medicine."

"The Mexicans tried to mob me once, right here in Vera Cruz," and Professor Kendal's lips tightened. "They have never tried again; for, when President Diaz, who has always been my good friend, learned of it, he had the ringleaders of the mob arrested and publicly whipped, and he

threatened to hang any Mexican who again attacked me or any one with me. The people of Mexico have come to know that President Diaz makes no idle threats; and, since then, I have had no trouble. But some of the Mexicans certainly do hate us gringos, as they call us. As for my magic yell: I called out that you were my friends; and that was all that was needed; for the people here all know me; and Diaz is still president. Now," and he turned to Loretta, with a smile, "I must congratulate this young lady on her heart and courage. But in Mexico all beasts are treated brutally; and it is usually useless to interfere, since the interference only postpones the brutality. Doubtless your friend, the driver, even now is taking out, in double measure, his wrath on the hide of that poor horse—— But, if I mistake not, that yelling and swearing in bad Spanish outside means the coming of Captain Kent and Chin Chink and Bill Burke with the impedimenta. And in time for the train!" and he hurried to the door of the station.

Ten minutes later the train, with a great deal of puffing and blowing-off of steam, came to a stop at the station; and a quarter of an hour thereafter our friends and all their baggage were on their way to the City of Mexico.



CHAPTER IX

IN MEXICO CITY

LORETTA had skilfully managed things so that now she sat on the seat with Professor Kendal. She had not forgotten that he had a wonderful story to tell; and she thought that now, while they were on their way to the City of Mexico, would be a splendid time for him to tell it. But it was fully half an hour before the impatient girl had an opportunity to ask him to tell the story; for her father and Captain Kent sat on the seat in front of them and kept up such a rapid-fire talk with Professor Kendal that she could not get in a word edgewise. However, at last her opportunity came and she promptly seized it, by asking him to tell the story of his adventure in the ruined old Toltec city and how he came in possession of his half of the broken cartouch of gold, adding that Dick and Harry had hinted that he had a wonderful story to tell, but had refused to tell what it was.

Professor Kendal's face at once sobered and he glanced back at Dick and Harry, who sat on the seat behind him, a bit reproachfully. Evidently he did not like the idea of again narrating his terrible experience with the Scalp-Pullers.

"The tale is not a pleasant one," he began slowly, "and I do not like to harrow my soul by recalling its dreadful incidents. But, since its happenings have to do with our present expedition, it is your right to hear it, and learn on what foundations I have builded my hopes of success in one of the strangest missions ever undertaken by human beings."

All, Captain Kent, Abel Johnson, Loretta, Cowboy Jim, Dick and Harry and even Bill Burke and Chin Chink, pressed as close as possible to Professor Kendal, so as not to miss a word of what he said, their faces picturing their deep and wondering interest, as once again he told the story our readers have already heard him narrate to Dick and Harry. Only this time, on account of the tender-hearted girl who sat beside him, he said nothing of the dreadful ceremony of the Scalp-Pullers, nor of the bloody horrors of the end of his men, nor how he came by the scar above his left eye; but all the rest of the tale he told as he had narrated it to Dick and Harry; and when he had come to the end of the story, he read the translation of the inscription found on the cartouch of gold.

So intensely interested were all during this recital and the reading of the inscription found on the cartouch of gold, that no one spoke, no one moved; and the eyes of all were fixed in wondering amazement on the Professor. It hardly seemed possible that such an extraordinary adventure could

have happened in that prosaic age; and yet, when they looked into the face of the Professor, they felt as if it must have happened. There was no guile in that countenance. They were, indeed, embarked on what promised to be the most remarkable adventure of their lives; and a great eagerness took possession of all to explore the ruins of that old Toltec city and to discover whence had come the mysterious rescuer of Professor Kendal.

Nothing happened of particular interest during the ride to Mexico City. Dick and Harry and Loretta spent the greater part of their time looking out of the car windows and laughing at the queer sights they saw. Especially interesting were the little villages the train passed through, with their crowds of natives that always gathered at the stations to see the train come in. The men busied themselves with planning the details of the expedition; and Bill Burke and Chin Chink, who still regarded each other with the darkest suspicions, kept their eyes glued to the windows, except when they were darting watchful glances of suspicion at each other. Each appeared to think that the other would bear watching.

It was late at night when their train reached the City of Mexico; and all, under the guidance of Professor Kendal, went at once to a hotel and to bed; for the long ride in the slow uncomfortable Mexican train had been exceedingly wearisome and they were completely tired out. Besides Professor Kendal had warned them that the morrow

would be a busy day and that he expected all them to be up early in the morning.

The next morning Dick and Harry were up early before Professor Kendal. Each of the boys had bought a set of Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, which they had been reading all their spare time since leaving Yahara, with the result that, under the charm of this gifted historian, the City of Mexico had become a city of romance which they were most eager to explore. But, when Professor Kendal appeared and they broached the project to him, he promptly and most emphatically vetoed it.

"No," he declared peremptorily. "The game before us now is too big to waste any of our time on sightseeing, however alluring the subjects. We must think of nothing now but the expedition; we must bend all our energies to getting everything ready to start at the earliest possible moment. Think what wonderful possibilities lie before us! Think of the Great Adventure we are about to undertake. No one can foresee what its end will be. No one can foretell what wonders it will unfold to us. Only we know that, somehow, the long-dead past seems to be calling us; and we must not tarry on our way. Yes, I know I am becoming obsessed with the wonder and the mystery of it all; but I do not see how any one under the circumstances could help becoming so obsessed. No, there will be no sightseeing now. When we return, you can explore the city at your leisure. Now, we will go

breakfast and then get busy on the day's work before us," and he led the way into the dining-room, where they were almost immediately followed by Abel Johnson, Loretta and Cowboy Jim.

There was no railroad running from the City of Mexico in the direction our friends wished to go. Consequently they were obliged to purchase horses to ride and a pack-train to carry their equipment and to hire the men needed for the expedition, in short to make ready the complete outfit of an expedition bound for the wilderness, to be gone an unknown length of time.

Professor Kendal kept them all on the jump every working hour of the four days that followed. He had outfitted many similar expeditions; and he knew just what to do and where it could be best done. He found his greatest difficulty in securing men. His ill-fated expedition of the year before had not been forgotten; and when it was learned that this expedition was to be to the ruins of the same devil-ridden old Toltec city, the average native would cross himself and hurry away, as if he expected the devil would get him, if he delayed, at the mere suggestion that he join the expedition. However, by extraordinary efforts and the promise of much largess, Professor Kendal, by the evening of the fourth day, had secured all the men he needed and had everything ready for the expedition to start.

"We leave to-morrow morning at sunrise," he said, as all gathered in his room after the evening

meal that night. "Let us get to bed early, sleep soundly and be ready to start the moment the sun rises above the eastern mountain tops. We will go direct to the place where I found the great bronze owl and the stone tigers, guarding the entrance of the chasm that is said to lead to the hidden valley wherein are the ruins of the old Toltec city, ruins that are now the dwelling-place of devils, according to the superstitious natives. I——"

At this moment the eyes of Professor Kendal rested on Loretta, who sat by the side of her father, a little to one side of the Professor; and he started and stopped abruptly.

"The expedition we are about to undertake," he began, after a moment's pause and with a troubled look on his face, "may involve us in dangers and hardships the nature of which we cannot now foresee; but which, judging by my own experience, may be of the kind to try the courage and the endurance of the bravest and strongest. Not until this moment did the thought of what all this might mean to a young girl like Loretta come to me. Frankly as much as I and I am sure all the rest would enjoy having her with us, I do not think, in view of these terrible uncertainties, that she should go. Can you not arrange for her stay here, until we get back?" and he turned his troubled countenance to Abel Johnson.

But, before her father could speak, Loretta jumped to her feet, her eyes flooded with tears and her lips quivering.

"Oh, please, please do not leave me behind!" she begged, her moist eyes turned imploringly to the face of Professor Kendal. "I am used to all kinds of outdoor life and hardships and can shoot and ride as well as any man. I want to explore those wonderful old ruins and have adventures just as much as any of you. I am not afraid and am ready to take whatever comes, just the same as you are. Oh, I wish I were a boy!" and the tears began to fall; but, almost instantly, she gave her head an angry toss, shaking the tears from her cheeks and eyes. "No, I don't," she declared. "I am a girl and I am proud of it; but I am just as able to go on this expedition as any boy; and I am going," and she looked up defiantly into Professor Kendal's face. "Dad," and she whirled about and faced her father, "tell him that I am going, that you didn't bring me all this distance to leave me alone in a city full of Greasers."

Abel Johnson laughed his big hearty laugh.

"Now don't go into a tantrum, little gal," he warned. "Your dad ain't thinking none of leaving you here alone among all these Greasers. I reckon, Professor," and Abel Johnson turned to Professor Kendal, "that you don't understand the circumstances. 'Retta's all that I've got in the world; and I am all that she's got. We've never been separated a week in our lives; and I couldn't think of leaving her here alone in this Greaser city. She's used to hardshipping with me on the plains; and, as she says, she can shoot and ride as well as any man.

I never knowed her to faint or act scarey, like woman, and she has been in some powerful ticklis situations, where her life didn't seem to be wort the flick of a steer's tail. As for the danger," an his face sobered—— "God knows I would give my own life to save her from harm! But I' rather have her, where I can face any dange that threatens her, however terrible that dange may be, along with her, than to leave her here with out my protection. Besides she is as fit as any bc of her age in the Great U. S. A. to go with us o this expedition; and she has set her heart on going and, I reckon, we had better let her go," and he smiled.

Professor Kendal hesitated a moment. The Scalp-Pullers had been destroyed, root and branch. He had President Diaz's own word for it. As for the other dangers were, possibly, imaginary; and Loretta certainly appeared to be a girl able to take care of herself, even on such an expedition as this. Well, after all, it was up to her father to decide and he wished her to go. His face cleared.

"All right, then," he said, "Loretta goes. But——" He stopped; for at that moment Loretta flung her arms around his neck and a rousing smack on his lips shut off his words.

Professor Kendal actually blushed and, for a moment, appeared to be greatly embarrassed; but after a moment's hesitation, he very gently pressed a kiss on the girl's forehead, held her close in his arms and then released her.

"That's the way I always thank dad, when he does anything that pleases me very, very, particular much," Loretta laughed, as she returned to her place by the side of her father. "I guess you are not used to having girls kiss you," and she looked up archly into Professor Kendal's face. "But I did so want to thank you for letting me go with you on this wonderful expedition; and that was the best way I could think of. It didn't hurt much, did it?" and again she looked up mischievously into the Professor's still flushed face.

"No," answered the Professor gallantly. "It was a delightful surprise; and—and, whenever in the future you feel as if you wanted to thank me particularly, I wouldn't mind if you did it that way. Now I have some writing that I must do before going to bed; and so I must ask you to leave me. Remember, we start to-morrow morning at sunrise, so get to bed early. Pleasant dreams to you all. Good-night," and Professor Kendal rose and bowed, in a somewhat absent-minded manner, a good-night to all.

Dick and Harry went to bed early that night, in accordance with the Professor's advice; but they did not go to sleep for some time after they were in their beds. Both boys occupied the same room in the hotel and their narrow beds were placed side by side. Their minds were too full of the exciting possibilities that began with the morrow for sleep to gain possession of their senses, at least not, until,

boylike, they had relieved the fulness of their minds by talking things over

"Say," Dick said, as he climbed into his bed, "I don't feel as if I could go to sleep to-night."

"Neither do I," responded Harry, as he put out the light and jumped into bed; "and, when I do go to sleep I expect to dream of great bronze owls, with eyes that shine like red fire and beaks that open and scream, and huge tigers, and great, black feathery things dropping down on me from out overhanging trees, and horrible apelike men getting their fingers under my scalp and jerking it off, and——"

"Ugh! Shut up!" and Dick swung his pillow with such sure aim that it landed full on Harry's face and effectually stop-cocked his vivid imagination for the time being. "You give me the creeps."

"And you gave me your pillow, which I now return, with thanks and interest," Harry retorted, as he suddenly seized the pillow and, putting all his strength into the throw, flung it back at Dick and then catching up an over-ripe banana, that had been left on the table by the side of his bed, he sent it after the pillow.

Dick dodged the pillow successfully and turned, with his mouth wide open to taunt Harry on his poor aim, just in time to catch the banana in his wide-opened mouth. There was a gurgling, choking sound and Dick tumbled out of his bed in a hurry and made a rush for the open window.

Harry rolled about on his bed, choking with laughter.

Dick turned from the window, caught sight of the pitcher of drinking water on the table and promptly emptied its contents down the back of Harry's neck.

"A truce! A truce!" spluttered Harry, seizing a corner of the sheet and waving it in front of him. "Behold my flag of truce! Do not violate it."

"All right," laughed Dick, "if you'll promise not to turn that dreadful imagination of yours loose again."

Harry promised and Dick set down the pitcher and returned to his bed.

All was quiet for the long space of five seconds, then Harry rolled over in his bed toward Dick.

"Dick," he said, "I have been wondering how the Toltecs we are hoping to find could have possibly kept themselves hidden from the rest of the world for so long a time; and the only way I can figure it out is that sometime long ago a great convulsion of nature or something shut them in their mountain valley, in such a way that no one in the valley could get out and no one outside of the valley could get in; and that this happened so long ago that to-day the very existence of the valley and the people who inhabited it has been forgotten. Now, what do you think of my solution of the mystery?"

"Well," responded Dick, "it sounds all right, except, if no one can get out of the valley, I don't see

how that mysterious man, who saved Professor Kendal's life and who is our only reason for believing that the Toltecs still exist, could have got out; and, if no one can get in, I don't see how we are going to do it. Now, honestly," and Dick lowered his voice, "it would not surprise me at all, if there were no Toltecs living to-day and no hidden valley and no hidden city, only the ruins of that old Toltec city that——"

"But," interrupted Harry, unable longer to control his impatience at Dick's surprising heresy, "there's that mysterious man and there's Professor Kendal's half of the broken cartouch and there's the writing on the cartouch. Where did that strange man come from? How did he come to have with him the very other half of the broken cartouch of gold that we found in the Cave of the Dead Kings in Colorado? I tell you, Dick, there is something in all this that we don't understand, something——"

"You are right," broke in Dick. "We certainly don't understand it; and we can't understand it; so, why bother our heads about it? I'm going to sleep. Good-night," and he rolled over in his bed, turning his back to Harry; and, in a few minutes, his heavy breathing told that he was sound asleep.

Harry lay a little longer, pondering over the strangeness of the quest they had undertaken and wondering what its outcome would be; then his waking thoughts gradually and queerly wandered off into dreams; and he, too, was sound asleep.



HOLY MIGUEL

PROFESSOR KENDAL had hired ten Mexicans, under the leadership of a swarthy, long-mustached, picturesquely dressed, ear-ringed native, known as Holy Miguel, on account of the frequency of his calling on the saints. Holy Miguel did not bear as saintly a reputation as his name might seem to imply; but he was said to be brave and known to be skilful in the handling of a pack-train and the managing of the uncertain natives; and, therefore, Professor Kendal had gladly hired him and the men he promised to secure, especially when Holy Miguel assured him that neither he nor his men were afraid of all the devils the devil-ridden old Toltec city could spout forth. Professor Kendal had never yet found the Mexican that he could not handle; and he did not expect to have any trouble with Holy Miguel and his men. But Captain Kent and Abel Johnson and, especially, Cowboy Jim, who had the American cowpuncher's inborn dislike and suspicion of everything Mexican, regarded Holy Miguel and his men with ill-concealed distrust and hinted as much to Professor Kendal.

"Yes," agreed the Professor, "they are certainly a suspicious-looking lot of rascals; and I doubt not would willingly murder us, if they dared and had the opportunity; but it is up to us not to give them the opportunity and I have already planted the fear of President Diaz deep in their hearts. They know that we are traveling under his special safeguard and that, if any harm comes to us through them they will be hunted down like so many marauding wolves. But, really, I had little choice in the matter. So great has become the dread of the superstitious native of enlisting in my services, since my unfortunate expedition of a year ago, that I doubt if I could have found ten other natives in all Mexico City to go with us. However, they may turn out to be just the kind of men we need on such an expedition, especially if they prove to be without the Mexican's usual courage-killing superstitions. At least they declare that they have no fear of the devil-ridden old Toltec city; and that counts a lot in their favor. They will be allowed to carry no weapons, except their knives; and, I fancy, six Americans, to say nothing of one American girl," and Professor Kendal bowed to Loretta, who was standing near, "will have no trouble in accounting for eleven unarmed Mexicans, if there is need of an accounting," and, with a smile, he dismissed the subject.

All this had happened the day before the morning set for the departure from the City of Mexico, when Holy Miguel had brought himself and men

to Professor Kendal for inspection and final instruction, and had been seen for the first time by our three Colorado friends. The Mexicans had also brought with them all the animals purchased for the expedition, the riding horses and the little burros, which are used almost exclusively in Mexico for pack-animals, especially when going into a mountainous region. Holy Miguel and his men had been directed to camp in the big courtyard of the hotel for the night and to have the animals all packed and everything ready for instant departure at sunrise the next morning. All of which Holy Miguel had vowed, with the assistance of the saints, to have done to the entire satisfaction of the señores and the señorita.

Dick was the first of the two boys to awaken on the eventful morning. It was still dark. He lit a match and looked at his watch. It was an hour before rising time; but Dick did not dare to go to sleep again for fear of oversleeping and at once arose, lit the gas and began to dress. Harry was still sound asleep and, when Dick had his clothes on, he turned, with a grin on his face, to the sleeping boy.

"Here's where I help Harry out with one of his vivid dreams," he soliloquized, the grin on his face widening. "Let me see, he spoke of dreaming of great, black, feathery things dropping down on him and trying to pull off his scalp—Bully! I have it!"

Dick tip-toed softly to his bed, on which was a particularly fat feather bed-tick, noiselessly lifted

the tick up in his arms and tip-toed with it to bedside of Harry.

Harry lay on his back, his face contorted a grimace of fear and horror. Evidently he having one of his vivid dreams.

Dick chuckled at sight of Harry's face, li the feather-tick up as high as he could and drop it down, ker-plunk, on top of Harry, and t leaping on top of it, seized hold of Harry's with both hands and began to pull.

Harry yelled, as if he imagined a blue d breathing fire and smelling of brimstone, had of his hair, clutched the bed-tick wildly in his a gave a violent lurch upward, tumbling Dick off bed and landing him on his back on the floor, a thump that made the windows rattle, and, another yell, jumped out of bed, knocking feather-tick off the bed on top of Dick.

At this instant Harry awoke and stared bla and a little wildly around the room. He ca sight of the feather-tick on the floor; and jun nearly a yard high, when he saw it suddenly itself up toward him. The next moment l tumbled the bed-tick off him and jumped to his a grin all over his face.

"Great guns, but I'm glad that was a drea and Harry turned somewhat shamefacedly to I "Did I make much of a holler?"

"You did," grinned Dick. "I'm expecting police, or whatever answers to them here, to c tearing into the room at any moment, for it

tainly sounded as if a dreadful murder was being committed."

"And so there was." Harry's smile was a bit sickly. "I thought seventeen naked, hairy and terribly hideous savages, armed with long knives, were chasing me up a steep hill, on top of which grew a great tree, with low wide-spreading branches. The savages were gaining on me and I thought when I got to the tree I would climb it. But, when I came to the tree, it changed suddenly into a hideously grinning hippopotamus, with his mouth wide open to receive me. Terrified, I tried to jump back; but, before I could make a move, a dreadful giant of a man, covered with long red hair and armed with a long red knife, seemed to jump right out of the red, wide-opened mouth of the hippo; and the next instant the hippo turned a double somersault and came down, squash! on top of me; and the red giant seized me by the hair of my head and began to pull. I guess that was where I yelled and tumbled out of bed."

"Yes," and Dick could hardly keep his laughter in long enough to speak, "and I guess that was when I dumped the feather-bed on top of you and then jumped on top of it and began pulling your hair. Gee-mi-ma, but that was some yell you gave, when I grabbed you by the hair!"

Harry looked from the feather-bed on the floor to Dick's grinning face—and understood.

"Well," he said philosophically, "I am so glad that it was only a dream that I'll forgive you this

time. Say," and he abruptly and eagerly changed the subject, "it must be time to get up anyway. Why, you are already dressed? Wait a moment and I'll be with you," and he began hurriedly dressing.

When Dick and Harry entered the big courtyard of the hotel a half hour later, they found Professor Kendal and Captain Kent already there, supervising the packing of the burros and seeing that everything was in readiness to start at the appointed time; and, a moment later, Abel Johnson and Loretta and Cowboy Jim hurried into the yard.

Loretta at once ran to the horse her father had bought for her to ride, which was "stabled" in a corner of the yard with the other riding horses; and Dick and Harry hurried after her, equally anxious to see their horses, which they had bought for themselves the day before.

"Isn't he a little beauty?" Loretta queried enthusiastically, as she threw one arm over the pony's neck and began softly stroking his velvety nose with the other hand. "And I am sure he has great speed, even if he is not very large. He is built like a racer. I," and Loretta's eyes critically examined the horses of the two boys. "Yes, I am quite sure that he can beat either of your horses, even if they are so much larger; and I here challenge both of you to a race at the first opportunity," and her face lit up and her eyes sparkled.

"We accept the challenge," grinned Dick. "And if the long legs of my Brimstone can't beat that little

horse of yours, I'll eat my hat—— No I won't," he amended hastily, as he took off the big, broad-brimmed, peaked Mexican straw hat that he wore and looked at it quizzically. "Why, this would make a meal for a horse. But," and he laughed, "I'll make Brimstone eat it, if he lets that little horse beat him."

"Then Brimstone will have all he wants to eat for once," smiled Loretta. "But, what a queer name for a horse. I am going to call my horse——" Loretta paused and her eyes critically, yet affectionately, surveyed the little horse that was to be her very own during the expedition, from his firm well-shaped hoofs to his expressive pointed ears and from his soft velvety nose to his long flowing tail.

He certainly was a little beauty. His body was a rich, dark, chestnut in color, with four white stockings and, oddly, a white mane and tail. His legs were long for his size, straight and well-muscled. His chest was broad and deep and his barrel round and beautifully curved. Altogether he was, as Cowboy Jim said, the moment he laid eyes on him, "a prize that it would be a sin to leave in a Greaser's hands."

"I know I am going to love him almost as much as I do Bonny Bess," Loretta continued, after her eyes had dwelt a moment on the symmetry and beauty of her prize; "and so I am going to just call him Bonny; and he is a bonny horse, if there ever was one!" and the other arm of the impulsive

girl went around the pony's neck and she drew his head down and pressed her soft cheek against

"Well, I suppose Bonny is all right for the name of a girl's horse," Harry declared, with an air of boylike superiority over anything feminine; "but I am going to name my horse Bullet, because, like a bullet, he will go straight and true to the mark when he's wanted to. Now, what are you really going to call your horse?" and he turned to Dick with a look that seemed to say, "beat that name you can."

"I'm going to stick to Brimstone," laughed Dick "because I am sure he is full of it by the yellow glitter in his eyes; and, just before I bought him, I saw him kick a Mexican about ten feet, when the brute jabbed the point of his knife into him to make him stand over. I liked his spirit, as well as his looks, and bought him on the spot—as soon as the Mexican had recovered his senses sufficiently to sell him. He is a spunky little brute; but I like spunk in a horse and I am sure he and I are going to get on fine. Aren't we, Brimstone?" and Dick stroked the glossy black neck of his horse.

Each boy was proud of the horse he had bought and with good reasons; for he had been aided in his selection by Abel Johnson and Cowboy Jim, both expert judges of horse-flesh, with the result that their horses were splendid riding animals, promising great speed and endurance. Dick's horse was a glossy black all over, except for a star on

his forehead; Harry's a beautiful dappled-gray. Otherwise there was practically no choice between the two animals, so far as appearance went, save that there seemed to be more "devil" in Brimstone's eyes, as was fitting in a horse with such a name.

The big courtyard was now a scene of picturesque activity. Flaming torches redly illuminated the darkness that the dawning day had not yet dispelled; and, darting hither and yon in the ruddy light were Holy Miguel and his men, all dressed in the picturesque brigandlike Mexican costume, as, with deft, experienced hands and much shouting and swearing in Mexican, they fastened the packs on the backs of the patient burros and otherwise made ready for the coming departure.

An added touch of picturesqueness was given to the scene by the dress of our friends, who had discarded their civilian clothes and now wore the western cowpuncher's outfit, than which there is no more practical and serviceable costume for an expedition such as they were about to begin. The only ones to change this costume in the slightest were Dick and Harry and Professor Kendal. Dick and Harry had been so charmed by the apparent coolness and the vagabondish looks of the big peaked Mexican straw hats that they had forsaken their sombreros for them, while Professor Kendal wore a tropical helmet and a sportman's dress, modified according to his needs. All were armed with rifles and in a belt around the waist of each

was a heavy six-shooter and a long hunting-knife. Even Loretta had a rifle, a revolver and a knife which had been made especially for her and which she could use as expertly as any man. Coward Jim and Abel Johnson, in addition, carried their ropes, tied to the pommels of their saddles. Neither would have felt at home in his saddle without them and both considered them very necessary articles to have along with them on an expedition like that of Holy Miguel and his men were weaponless, save for long and ugly-looking knives thrust in their belts, at least no other weapons showed; for Professor Kendal, to be on the safe side, had insisted that they carry no other weapons.

At last all the preparations for departure were completed. Holy Miguel had kept his promise to have everything in readiness to start by sunrise and, not without a touch of pride, he now turned to Professor Kendal and signified that he and his men were ready. Professor Kendal, with a final look around to make sure that nothing had been forgotten, jumped upon the back of his horse and placing himself at the head of the little company gave the order to start; and, with a great deal of yelling by the Mexicans at the burros, the unique cavalcade rode slowly out through the gateway of the courtyard and on into the streets of Mexico City.

The expedition was now fairly on its way; and in seven or eight days at the most, should be at the gateway of the hidden valley, wherein lay the t

solved mystery of the ruins of the old Toltec city, a mystery that, under the spell of that ages-old cartouch of gold, they had come so far to solve. And, in its solving, God alone knew what might happen to them!



WAR BETWEEN AFRICA AND ASIA

FROM the City of Mexico to Acapulco on the west coast of Mexico, runs a trail that has been traversed for centuries by the rude Mexican ox-carts and pack-trains of burros. This trail passes through the very heart of the rugged Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains, which, at the time of which I write, contained many wild regions that had never been pressed by the feet of the adventurous white man. The valley, wherein lay the ruined Toltec city in which Professor Kendal had had his strange and dreadful adventure with the Scalp-Pullers, was somewhere within these mountains, a journey of a day or more from the trail. Accordingly, it was along this trail, when once outside of Mexico City, that Professor Kendal led his little party.

Everything was new and strange and interesting to Dick and Harry and Loretta, as they rode along the trail, side by side, the girl between the two boys. Now it was a gay cavalcade of wealthy Mexicans on their way to Mexico City, bright-colored cloaks flying out behind them, spurs and

accouterments jingling, as they dashed by, that attracted their attention. Again it was a long and heavily loaded pack-train, moving slowly over the trail, the raggedly, yet picturesquely dressed drivers and attendants shouting and swearing and frequently beating the patient pack-animals and turning curious wondering eyes in their direction, as they met and passed. Next, it might be an ox, dragging a groaning Mexican ox-cart, in which was crowded an entire Mexican family, man and wife and, mayhap, a dozen children of all ages and both sexes and the most wonderful dark glowing eyes ever placed in human heads. Then, possibly, the trail passed through a quaint, but exceedingly dirty and smelly, little Mexican village, inhabited by dogs and naked babies and lazy-looking cigarette-smoking idly-lounging men and picturesquely dressed women, all of whom, to every dog in the village, crowded along the trailside to see the crazy Americanos go by. Then, again, the trail wound its way through a forest, where odd forms of vegetation or wonderfully colored birds or laughably inquisitive monkeys, swinging from tree to tree in an endeavor to keep sight of them, were continually awakening their wonder and interest. Altogether that first day along the old Acapulco Trail was a wonderful day to Dick and Harry and Loretta; and, when night came and Professor Kendal gave the word to halt and pitch camp, they felt as if they had passed one of the most interesting days of their lives.

And they were not the only ones who had been interested. Bill Burke's eyes had been constantly rolling from one side of the trail to the other, while the funny little kinks and wrinkles had been continually chasing one another all over his black face; and many were his ejaculations of astonishment and wonder. Likewise Cowboy Jim had been interested, but somewhat disgusted spectator. He could not see anything really good in or about the Mexican; but, he admitted, the Mexican was something of a picturesque and dirty cuss that he could not help being, "like a phoby-cat or a bedbug, something interesting, but none companionable," to quote his own words.

The camp was pitched a little to one side of the trail, on the flat top of a small wooded hill that rose somewhat abruptly from the bank of a stream of water. Here were fuel for the fire, water to drink and grass for the horses and pack-animals, three prime requisites of a good camping-spot. Holy Miguel and his men built a great camp-fire for themselves; and, a little way from it, Bill Burke and Chin Chink made a smaller fire for Professor Kendal and his party and pitched their tents near-by. The Mexicans had no tents and needed none. They were accustomed to sleeping out in the open; and, when night came, all they required was a blanket to roll themselves up in and a small spot of ground on which to lie.

Everything, this first night of camping out, was as smoothly as the most exacting campers could

wish, until after supper. Then the trouble that had been drawing to a head between Bill Burke and Chin Chink, ever since the negro's eyes rested on the yellow face and long pig-tail of the Mongolian and the Chinaman's oblique orbs had noted the black skin and woolly head of the darkey, broke loose.

On the previous expedition of the boys, Bill Burke had been their cook and had gloried in his skill in satisfying their vigorous young appetites. Now he saw himself ousted out of this honored position by the pig-tailed Chinaman, who was to do the cooking for all, except the Mexicans, who had their own cook; and his heart was filled with jealousy and rage. And, to add insult to injury, Chin Chink, during the preparation of the meal, had been ordering him about, as if he were his servant. Many times Bill Burke had been on the point of rebelling; but had desisted because he did not wish to make trouble for "Massah Dick." However, his temper was fast getting the better of what little judgment he had; and the way he shook his head, like an angry ram, and the manner in which the wrinkles jumped after one another all over his face, would have been ample warning to Chin Chink, if he had known Bill Burke better, that something was likely to happen to him sudden and unexpected, if he continued his lording it over the negro, even in his quiet Chinese way.

And something did happen!

When it came time to wash the dishes, Chin

Chink picked up an empty water-pail and turned to Bill Burke.

"Black man, you go getee water lan' washee dishee," he said, holding out the pail to Bill Burke and pointing to the stream of water, with something of the air of a mandarin giving an order to his servant.

Instantly a rush of wrinkles jumped all over Bill Burke's face, and one of his big feet flew up and hit the pail a whack that sent it flying over the Chinaman's head, and he began shaking his head and gritting his teeth in so terrible a manner that Chin Chink, with a look of deadly fear on his sallow face commenced backing rapidly away from him, his eyes fixed in a sort of fascination on the negro's countenance.

"T's not yo' serbant, yo' yellah, pig-tailed, squint-eyed chunk ob heathen bombosity! Go getee de dishee watee yo' selbee," and Bill Burke suddenly lowered his head, his two hands shot up under his chin, and he rushed forward, head down, straight toward Chin Chink, who had backed, until now he stood directly on the spot where the hill sloped most precipitously down to the stream of water.

Before the terrified and dumbfounded Chinaman understood what was happening, Bill Burke's head struck him in the pit of the stomach; and, with an explosive grunt, that sounded like the going off of an enormous popgun, he was lifted off his feet and hurled backward. He struck the ground about ten

feet down the precipitous side of the hill, rebounded and landed on his back, with a tremendous splash, in the water. The momentum of Bill Burke took him half-way down the side of the hill, where he stood, shaking his head and wrinkling his face at Chin Chink.

"Don't you' dare come out ob dat watah, or I's gwine to knock de Atlantic Ocean down you' mouff, yo' yellah rapscallion!" he yelled.

Chin Chink struggled to his feet, the water was only up to his hips, and stood glaring up at Bill Burke and began spitting out pidgin-English and Chinese, with the speed of a Gatling gun shooting bullets.

The sound of Chin Chink's grunt, when Bill Burke's head struck him, was the first notice our friends had of the war between Africa and Asia. All jumped to their feet in time to see Chin Chink hit the water. The looks and actions of the negro and the Chinaman were now so comical that no one had the heart to make a move to put an end to the fracas. The circus was too good to be spoiled.

At this moment Chin Chink's eyes caught sight of the tall form of Professor Kendal; and, instantly, he plunged out of the water and started up the bank toward him.

"Yo' yellah debble, git back in dat watah," and Bill Burke lowered his head and charged again.

Chin Chink saw him coming and, with a yell, turned to flee. But, before he had taken two steps, Bill Burke's head struck him where the striking was

good, and knocked him sprawlingly, face down, back into the water. But, this time, Bill Burke had acted without taking into account the steepness of the hillside and his own momentum and, unable to stop himself, plunged, headfirst, into the water on top of the Chinaman.

Chin Chink's head came to the surface first; and, with astonishing quickness, he realized the situation and, jumping on top of the back of Bill Burke, seized hold of his two ears, his hair was too short to offer a grip, and attempted to keep his head under the water. But Bill Burke was unusually strong and, in spite of the incubus on his back, struggled to his feet, spouting water out of his mouth like a black squirtgun, and tried to shake the Chinaman off. Chin Chink only wound his legs the tighter around the negro's body and held on to the two ears the harder. Bill Burke could not shake him off. Besides his ears, where the Chinaman gripped them, were hurting him desperately, and the harder he shook, the tighter Chin Chink clung to the ears and, consequently, the worse they hurt him.

Suddenly a bright idea came into the negro's head; and he flung himself backward down into the water. This, of course, obliged Chin Chink to let go or drown; and, squirming out from under the negro, he struggled to his feet and started for the shore, just as one of Bill Burke's long arms shot out and caught him by the pig-tail.

"Yo' yellah debble, come back an' git a'other

drink," and Bill Burke gave the pig-tail so violent a jerk that Chin Chink was yanked backward down into the water again.

Professor Kendal, who, like the others, had been enjoying this battle royal between the black and yellow races immensely, now thought it time for him to interfere; and, hurrying down the bank, he jumped into the water and, gripping each by the collar of his coat, dragged them both out on dry land and stood them up facing each other.

"The war is over and peace is declared," he said, frowning fiercely at each of the belligerents. "Chin Chink, shake hands with your friend, Bill Burke. Bill Burke, shake hands with your friend, Chin Chink."

Bill Burke glanced at the Professor's face—and extended his hand.

Chin Chink seized hold of it and shook it warmly.

"Me velly glad to makee flends," he said, a bland smile spreading all over his countenance. "Now me go getee watee and washee dishee for my flend, Billee Burkee," and, dropping Bill Burke's hand, he hurried to where the pail lay, picked it up and started to the stream to fill it with water.

Bill Burke's mouth widened into a grin, that showed his teeth like two rows of tombstones.

"I reckon dis niggah won't 'low no pig-tailed heathen to discommudle-fuddle him 'round dis camp," he declared, the grin on his face broadening. "Now, dat I's done asservated mah magnudity, I's gwine to help dat Chin Chink wid dem

dishes," and he hurried up the hill, all his wrath gone, to where the dishes were stacked.

Thus were harmony and peace completely restored, for the time being, between warring Asia and Africa.

Nothing worthy of recording happened during the remainder of the night; and, early the next morning our friends were again on their way.

Holy Miguel proved that he thoroughly understood the work for which he had been hired, managing his part of the expedition so well that even Cowboy Jim gave him grudging praise.

"But," the cowpuncher hastened to add, "that doesn't mean that we should let up none on keeping our eyes on him and his men. I never knowed a bronc, with such an eye, that wouldn't kick daylight out of his best friend at the first chance and buck sudden and unexpected; and, I reckon, a Greaser is a sort of bronc among humans."

"I feel about the same way as you do," admitted Captain Kent, who rode by the side of Cowboy Jim at the time he made the above remark. "I don't like the look in that Mexican's eyes; but he certainly does understand handling an expedition like this; and, so far, I've seen nothing suspicious about him or his men. Possibly, we are prejudiced against him and his men, seeing that they are Mexicans; but it won't do no harm to keep an eye on them, as you say. They are all treacherous-looking rascals."

"That they are," cheerfully agreed Professor

Kendal, who rode a little ahead, turning in his saddle with a smile. "I knew they were a gang of cut-throats, when I hired them, who would murder us all, if they dared; and I very frankly told them so. At the same time I very solemnly impressed upon them the fact that this expedition was under the especial protection of President Diaz, that I had left with the President a complete list of their names and that he had promised to hang everyone of them, if any harm came to us through them; and Holy Miguel and his men fear President Diaz more than they do anything else on this earth. Then, in addition, I drew a very vivid picture of the skill and the fighting ability of the terrible Americanos, who were to accompany me and who would be ready to shoot to kill at the slightest provocation. As for myself—" The smile left Professor Kendal's face and his lips tightened and his huge frame stiffened. "They know me; and they fear me. They also know that they will get a square deal from me, as long as they deserve it and that I will pay them every cent I promise. That is why they agreed to go with me, notwithstanding the unusual condition on which I insisted, that they go unarmed, save for their knives. They know that we know them for the villains that they are and that we will always be on our guard against them. I like to have a complete understanding with the men I employ," and the smile came back to Professor Kendal's face.

"You sure do," grinned Cowboy Jim; "and, I

reckon, it is up to us to keep the fear of President Diaz and our six-shooters warm in their hearts. Now, what do you reckon them youngsters want?" and he pointed to where Dick and Harry and Loretta, who had ridden on a half-mile or more ahead, had suddenly whirled their horses about and now sat in their saddles, side by side, signaling and yelling excitedly to them.

At first they could not make out what was wanted, then Abel Johnson suddenly clapped one of his big hands against his hip.

"It' a race!" he cried excitedly. "My little gal is going to race them two boys; and I'll bet a steer she beats them both. There's not a jockey alive that knows better how to get all there is in a horse out of him, than 'Retta does."

"You are right. It is a race," declared Cowboy Jim; "and they want us to mark the goal and judge the winner. Now," and his eyes glanced swiftly about for a fitting spot to end the race, "let's call that big rock one of the winning-posts and the tree a couple of rods from it the other. We'll stretch my rope from one post to the other. I'll hold one end and Abel can hold the other; and the horse that touches the rope first wins," and Cowboy Jim swiftly unloosened the lasso from the horn of his saddle and took his station by the side of the rock, while Abel Johnson, with the other end of the rope in his hand, pulled his horse up by the side of the tree. They held the rope between

them so that a horse in passing could not help touching it.

All was now ready for the race; and Professor Kendal, whose big lungs gave him a tremendous voice, made a trumpet out of his hands.

"All ready here!" he shouted. "Come when you are ready!"

The whole expedition now had paused and stood anxiously and excitedly awaiting the coming race. Holy Miguel and his men began feverishly laying wagers on its outcome.

The young riders had chosen their race-course wisely. For a mile or more a smooth level strip of ground lay alongside the trail, with a short tough turf, making almost an ideal race-track. It was the sight of this strip of ground that had recalled to Loretta her challenge to the boys and caused her to suddenly pull up her horse and dare them to have the race right then and there. The boys were more than willing and instantly whirled their horses about and proposed that they race back to where Professor Kendal and the others were. Loretta agreed; and they at once began shouting and signaling their purpose to the men, with the results already narrated.

"When I count three and shout 'go! go! go!'" Dick said, as soon as Professor Kendal's shout had reached them. "Are you ready?" and he turned to Loretta and then to Harry.

"Yes," each answered.

"Then here goes for the championship of the

Kendal Expedition. One—two—three—GO!” — yelled and dug his spurs into his horse’s flanks.

As if started by one shaft of machinery, the three horses sprang forward. Breast to breast they ran for some distance, then Harry’s Bullet began to make good his name and drew slowly ahead. This caused Dick to use his quirt; and, in a moment more, Brimstone was in the lead, with Loretta’s Bonny a length behind Bullet.

All the onlookers by now had become intensely excited. Abel Johnson was standing up in his stirrups and shouting wildly to Loretta to use her quirt. Cowboy Jim was whirling his hat around his head with his free hand and whooping like a wild man. Holy Miguel and his men were dancing up and down with excitement. Only Professor Kendal sat quietly on his horse and watched the race critically.

Loretta was now a rod behind Harry, who was plying his quirt vigorously in a desperate effort to overtake Dick, who was a good two lengths ahead of him; and the race was half run! Loretta, up to this time, had not used her quirt. Now she suddenly swung it above her head and brought it down with all her strength on the side of Bonny at the same moment giving voice to a series of shrill yells. The whip and the yells seemed to put new legs under Bonny, so rapidly did he gain on Bullet. Soon his head was even with Bullet’s tail, then he was abreast of him, ahead, and gaining on Brimstone.

Dick heard Loretta's yells, glanced back and saw her coming; and, with a yell that would have raised the hair on a Comanche Indian, turned and plied quirt and spurs desperately. But Bonny still continued to gain; and, in a moment more, he was running nose and nose with Brimstone—and the goal not ten rods away! In desperation, Dick leaned forward along the neck of Brimstone, until his mouth was close to one of his ears; and yelled, with all the strength of his lungs and vocal cords. At the same time he brought his quirt down with every ounce of muscle in his arm back of it and jabbed his spurs with all the strength of his legs.

Brimstone, as if each leg were a moving piston into which a sudden jet of steam had been injected, shot forward—and touched the rope of a good six feet ahead of Bonny!

The race was run and Loretta, very much to her chagrin, had been defeated.

"If you had not given that horrible yell, right into the ear of Brimstone, I am sure I would have beaten you," Loretta declared, a trifle indignantly, as she pulled up her panting horse by the side of Brimstone. "Any way Bonny has proven himself a splendid runner and I am proud of him. He is the easiest riding horse that I ever rode, except my own dear Bonny Bess," and Loretta leaned forward and softly stroked the neck of her pony.

"Well, it was your yells that put me wise to what yelling could do," laughed Dick. "But Brim-

stone can run, can't he?" and he began proudly stroking his horse's neck.

"Neither of your critters has anything on Bullet," grinned Harry, pulling his horse up by the side of Bonny. "The way he started out proves that I could have beaten both of you, only," and the grin broadened, "my chivalrous heart would not permit me to beat a lady," and he bowed to Loretta.

Loretta and Dick both laughed and were about to answer back, when Professor Kendal's great voice boomed out.

"The race is over. Everybody get a-going," he called; and slowly, with much shouting at the tired burros, the expedition again got under way.



CHAPTER XII

THE DEVIL-MAN



ON the third day after the exciting race between Loretta and the boys, the trail left the level of the great central plateau and entered the rugged passes and narrow valleys of the Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains. The scenery now was grand and awe-inspiring. Great rocks, , 'ed one on top of the other, towered high above their heads on all sides; and, in the distance, lofty snow-crowned peaks stood out like grim white-haired sentinels. Sometimes the trail ran along a huge narrow shelf of rock, projecting out from the almost precipitous face of a mountain, with a wall of rock on one side and a precipice hundreds of feet deep on the other; and again it wound its way over the rock-strewn and tree-overgrown bottom of a narrow mountain valley.

About the middle of the afternoon of the day after the trail entered the mountains, our friends came to where an enormous rock a couple of hundred or more feet high thrust itself up through the bottom of the center one of these narrow mountain valleys, dividing it into two smaller valleys. The

trail to Acapulco continued on along the bottom of the wider of these two valleys.

Professor Kendal, when he came to this great rock, called a halt.

"Here is where we leave this friendly trail," he said. "Our way lies up that valley," and he pointed to the smaller of the two valleys; "and, if we have good luck, to-morrow night we will camp at the entrance to the chasm, guarded by the great bronze owl and the two stone tigers; and, early the next morning, we will enter the chasm leading to the ruins of the old Toltec city; and——" He paused and his great frame straightened and his face and eyes glowed. "God alone knows what we will find there, or what will happen to us; but I am hoping to make the most wonderful discovery of the age; and I am trusting God to bring us safely back." For a moment he stood silent, his face showing that he was seeing visions. Then, with a start, like one abruptly awakened from deep day-dreaming, he turned to Holy Miguel.

"About two hours' journey from here," he said, "the valley widens out into a small lake. We will pitch our camp to-night on the shore of this lake, so get your pack-train under way. You will find the trail a rough one."

"Si, señor," answered Holy Miguel; and the expedition proceeded on its way up the unbroken trail of the smaller valley.

Dick and Harry and Loretta, who were sitting on their horses directly behind Professor Kendal,

had thrilled at his words. Another day and they would be at the actual beginning of their great adventure! What marvels, what adventures might it not place before them! Boylike and girl-like they did not think of the possible hardships, sufferings and perils, only of the greatness and the strangeness of the venture.

"When we get to the entrance of the chasm," Dick asserted, "I am going to examine the great bronze owl and see if I can discover how, on that dreadful night Professor Kendal told of, the eyes seemed to shoot forth red flames and the great head lifted and the beak opened and uttered that hideous shriek. Of course it must have been done in some mechanical way and I am going to try and find out how."

"Well, you will do it without any of my help," Loretta declared with a shiver. "Nothing could tempt me to go near enough to touch that dreadful bird. Think of the unnumbered centuries it has been hovering there between those walls of rock, guarding the entrance to the ruins of the old Toltec city. I should expect to find it inhabited by a Toltec devil or some other horrible ghostly thing. Every time I think of it the goose-flesh comes out all over me. Talk of something else, please."

"Oh," laughed Dick, "I didn't suppose you ever had goose-flesh. I've seen you in some terribly tight places and you never looked at all frightened. But, to change the subject, isn't this scenery great? I never saw anything to beat it, not even in the

Rockies. Now look——” Dick stopped abruptly and an expression of wondering astonishment came on his face. “Great Moses!” he cried, after a moment’s amazed staring up the valley. “Look there!” and he pointed up the valley and to its right side. “If that is not a giant arm and hand, carved out of the solid rock, with the index finger of the hand pointing to that pillarlike rock on the opposite side of the valley, I’ll eat my hat, even if it is a Mexican one—— Professor Kendal! Captain Kent!” and the excited boy struck the spurs into his horse and galloped up to where the two men were riding side by side a couple of rods ahead.

Professor Kendal and Captain Kent pulled up their horses and turned to Dick.

“Look there!” he cried, pointing to the giant arm and hand, as he stopped his horse by the side of theirs. “See, the end of that big rock that juts out from the right side of the valley, has been carved into a great arm and hand, with the index finger of the hand pointing straight to that tall pillarlike rock on the opposite side of the valley.”

Professor Kendal and Captain Kent both looked at their amazement, as their eyes followed Dick’s pointing hand to where, some two hundred yards from where they sat staring on their horses, a great armlike rock thrust itself out from the side of the valley. Professor Kendal quickly applied his powerful telescope to his eye.

“It is a bare arm and hand,” he declared, after

he had examined it a moment through the telescope; "and it has been cut out of the rock by the hand of man. I can see the work of the chisel very plainly. Evidently it is of Toltec origin; for there are a number of partly effaced Toltec characters cut in the forearm. Think of the centuries it must have stood there, pointing with its motionless finger across the valley." As he spoke, he followed the line of the pointing finger with the telescope, until his eye rested on the pillarlike rock. "And, yes it points directly toward that tall rock on the opposite side of the valley." He paused, for a moment, while his eye studied the rock, his face expressing astonishment and deep interest. "And the rock," he continued, "looks exactly like an Egyptian obelisk; and its sides are apparently covered with Toltec characters. Come on. I must examine that rock more closely," and the excited man struck spurs into his horse and hurried off in the direction of the pillarlike rock.

Dick and Harry and Loretta instantly followed, while behind them Captain Kent, Abel Johnson and Cowboy Jim came more slowly, a look of wondering amazement on their faces.

Bonny at once placed Loretta in the lead; and she turned her flushed face back to the boys and called: "Here's where I beat you both to the rock."

The boys instantly accepted the challenge and began plying spurs and quirts. But Bonny, in spite of their utmost efforts, kept his lead and

brought his proud mistress first to the base of the tall rock, possibly on account of his greater skill in getting over rough ground.

"There, I knew Bonny could beat your two old plugs," she laughed, as the two boys dashed up to her side. "But," and her eyes widened with wonder, "look at that rock! It surely has been cut out by man; and see its sides are covered with the same kind of queer characters that are on the cartouch."

At this moment Professor Kendal rode up, followed, a moment later, by Captain Kent, Cowboy Jim and Abel Johnson; and the eyes of all at once began examining the rock with eager curiosity and deep interest.

And it was well worth their study!

The rock, at its base, was twenty feet square and stood on a pedestal, cut out of the solid rock, twenty-five feet square and ten feet high. Four feet above the top of the pedestal, the rock began tapering gradually and evenly to its top, which was not more than two feet square and some forty feet high. The four sides of the rock had evidently been covered with Toltec picture-writing; but time and weather had nearly effaced the ancient engraver's art. Only a character here and there remained complete; but the skill of Professor Kendal found the names of the Toltec god, Quetzalcoatl, Acxiti, the last king of the Toltecs, and the high priest, Quauhtl, all of whom were mentioned in the inscription on the cartouch of

gold, and a disjointed reference to a southern migration, after the glory of the Toltec nation had been destroyed by war, famine and pestilence.

This seeming verification of the words written on the cartouch, found here in an unknown mountain valley in the wilds of Mexico, carved on an obelisk-like rock, filled them all with wonder and awe. It came almost like a message of assurance from out that long-dead past, assurance that they were on the verge of something remarkable and wonderful; and it was not until the sinking sun warned him of the approaching darkness of night that Professor Kendal forced himself to take his eyes from the rock.

"If we would reach the lake to-night we must hurry on," he said. "But, when we return, I must thoroughly examine this rock and the great arm and hand across the valley. I have long contended that the Toltecs had much in common with the Egyptians; and this obelisk, for it is plainly an obelisk cut out of a single great block of rock, will go far in proving my contention. But, there is greater things ahead and we must on. I do not understand how I missed seeing this remarkable rock, when I passed here before," and a puzzled look came on his face and almost instantly disappeared. "Now I remember," and he smiled with satisfaction at having thus quickly solved the mystery, "we passed through this part of the valley when it was nearly dark and we were in too much of a hurry to get to a good camping-place to see

anything but the road immediately in front of us. The lake is now only a short distance ahead. Come on," and Professor Kendal, followed by the others, hurried back to where Holy Miguel and his men were resting by the sides of their tired burros.

"Say, but this is getting some interesting, even to a Colorado puncher," Cowboy Jim declared as he rode along by the side of the boys and Loretta, when the expedition was again in motion. "When the Professor talked about them ancient Toltecs and their civilization, I figgered that he was just throwing rope and catching wind; but now I am beginning to think there may be a wild Texas long-horn at the end of his rope; and I am some anxious to see the tussle. He's sure after big game, if them Toltecs show up in the corral the way he is figgering they will."

"He sure is," grinned Harry in reply. "But I am hoping there won't be any Scalp-Pullers in the big round-up."

"Ugh!" and Loretta pretended to shiver. "Don't dare mention the Scalp-Pullers again. Just the sound of the words give me the creeps all over," and she glanced apprehensively around the already darkening valley.

Indeed, the dread words seem to fall with a chill on the spirits of all, for there was no more joking and they rode on in silence.

Fortunately, just as it was getting so dark that it made traveling over the rough trail difficult and dangerous, they came to where the valley widened

and saw the waters of the lake sparkling in the vanishing light of the sun. Here they at once went into camp for the night; and, by the time the pack-animals and the horses were unloaded and unsaddled, hobbled and turned loose to feed on the grass that grew abundantly along the shores of the lake, and the two camp-fires were built, it was too dark to see anything distinctly a rod away.

A little grove of trees grew on one side of the lake and it was near these trees that the camp was pitched. The camp-fire of Holy Miguel and his men blazed in the edge of this grove; and some two rods away and nearer the lake glowed the smaller fire of the Americans. All, tired by the day's journey, made their beds early; and by nine o'clock the camp was at rest.

The guards on this night, the first since leaving the safety of the Acapulco Trail, were doubled. Two Americans and two Mexicans, from now on, were to be on watch during every hour of the night, divided so that an American would always stand guard with a Mexican. This made the guard-duty rather hard on the Americans; but all agreed that it was the only safe thing to do, since Holy Miguel and his men were still under suspicion and it was necessary to watch both the camp and the animals.

Dick had the hours from twelve to three for his guard-duty on this night; and, when Professor Kendal, who had been in the watch just previous to his, awoke him, he reported all safe and quiet

and that Pedro, one of the Mexicans, would stand guard with him over the camp, while Cowboy Jim and another Mexican guarded the horses, which had been gathered in a bunch some five rods away.

Every one in camp, except the sentinels, appeared to be sound asleep when Dick, rifle in hand and revolver in belt, took his station underneath one of the trees, a little back from the camp-fire of the Mexicans. Pedro stood in the shadows of the trees on the opposite side of the fire. There was no moon; and, in that narrow mountain valley, the darkness was so great that Dick, when outside the light of the camp-fire, could not see a thing six feet from him.

An hour passed; and not a sound, not a movement had disturbed the quiet of the night. The camp-fires now had burnt down to great beds of glowing coals. From where Dick stood, the sleeping forms of the Mexicans, rolled up in their blankets and lying with their feet to the fire, looked like shadowy logs. The silence was oppressive. It seemed unnatural. He longed for some sound that would indicate that he was in the land of the living, not that of the dead; and, suddenly, it came, a soft, thudlike sound, followed by a low choking gurgle; and then the deathlike silence again. The sound appeared to have come from the darkness beyond the camp-fire, from the very spot where Pedro, his fellow guard, should be standing.

Dick started and shivered. There had been something uncanny in the queer, quickly sup-

pressed sound. He strained his eyes to see if he could distinguish the form of Pedro, who had been standing leaning against the trunk of a large tree, just within the circle of the light of the camp-fire. He had seen him there but a moment before; and when he had turned his eyes in another direction, to have them suddenly recalled by the odd sound.

Pedro had disappeared.

In vain Dick strained his eyes and ears. Not a sound could he hear and not a movement could he see in the direction where, a moment before, Pedro had been standing. A chill struck his heart; and yet Pedro might have stepped behind the trunk of the tree and the sound—— Again he shivered at the thought of that soft, thudlike sound and choking gurgle, unlike anything he had ever heard before. There was but one thing for him to do. He must investigate.

Very carefully, with his finger pressing the trigger so as not to make a sound, Dick cocked his rifle and, holding it ready for instant use, cautiously circled the camp-fire, keeping out of the light of the fire and in the thick shadows under the trees, until he came close to the spot where he had last seen Pedro standing. Here he paused, every faculty alert, and listened intently, while his eyes searched the place where Pedro should be. He could now see the trunk of the tree distinctly. Pedro was not behind it, was not in sight.

He gave a sudden horrified start. A dark log-like object lay at the foot of the tree. Could it

be Pedro? Had he lain down and fallen asleep? If so, he must awaken him.

With catlike tread, Dick stepped closer. It was Pedro. But his attitude was not that of one who sleeps. Again the chill struck his heart. He stood a moment staring down at the form. It did not move. Then he bent over and grasped it by the shoulder and lightly shook it. There was no response. Dick shook harder. Still no response; and the form felt limp and lifeless. With a sickening feeling of dread, Dick seized the shoulder with both hands and partly lifted the form from the ground; and then, with an exclamation of horror, he dropped it, straightened up and whirled around, his cocked rifle to his shoulder, his finger on the trigger.

At that moment a piercing scream came from the darkness directly in front of Dick; and he pulled the trigger.

At the sound of that unearthly scream and rifle shot, every man in camp leaped to his feet; and, a moment later, Dick was surrounded by the excited men, rifles in their hands, wanting to know what had happened.

Dick pointed to the still form of Pedro on the ground.

Professor Kendal, with an exclamation of horror, bent quickly and, picking up the body, carried it close to the camp-fire and laid it down where the light could shine on the face.

One look told the story. Pedro was dead.

No need to ask how he had died. The imprints of dreadful fingers, with clawlike nails, showed fresh on his throat and the head hung loosely. The neck was broken.

Holy Miguel and two or three others of the Mexicans came forward and examined the body. When they saw the claw marks on the throat and that the neck was broken, they shuddered and crossed themselves.

"Virgin Santissima! Madre de Dios! It is the work of the devil-man!" and Holy Miguel lifted his eyes to the face of Professor Kendal. "In my youth have I heard tell of him, how great hairy arms reach out of the darkness and clawlike fingers grip the throat and squeeze and shake until the neck breaks."

Holy Miguel paused a moment and crossed himself and muttered the names of his favorite saints.

"And then, señor," he continued, the look of horror deepening on his face, "the devil-man seizes the throat between his dog-like teeth and sucks the soul out and takes it back with him to hell. See, here are the holes made by the teeth," and Holy Miguel thrust the dead man's chin back, exposing the throat, and pointed to two holes, one on each side of the throat, which were already beginning to turn black. "Look how they are blackened and scorched with the sins of the soul that passed out through them. May the Holy Virgin and all the saints protect us from such a fate!" and he crossed himself and began muttering prayers.

All shuddered at the horrible words of Holy Miguel and cast apprehensive and fearful glances out into the surrounding blackness of the night; and the Mexicans hastily threw great armfuls of wood on the fire, until its flames blazed high and drove back the close-pressing darkness.

"We can do nothing until daylight, except to keep the fires burning brightly and a close watch," Professor Kendal declared, when it had been made certain that no other harm had been done by their mysterious and dreadful visitant. "Captain Kent and I will stand guard for the rest of the night, in addition to the regular guard. All the rest of you had better go back to your beds and get all the sleep you can. I feel quite certain that the danger is over for the night; and, doubtless, in the morning we will be able to learn something of the nature of the terrible being that committed this frightful act. Now, go back to your beds and to peaceful slumbers. We will see that no harm comes to you," and, with a heartening look of assurance around the circle of horrified faces, he turned to Captain Kent.

But sleep did not close a single eyelid for the remainder of that night. The Americans went back to their beds; but only to lay and ponder over the dreadful happening and vainly try to solve the mystery of the nature of the strange and terrible being that had so suddenly and in such a horrible manner killed Pedro. Bill Burke and Chin Chink clung so closely to the fire that they nearly roasted

ls of Holy themselves. Holy Miguel and his men hugged
ful glances their camp-fire, which they kept blazing high, and
the night talked in low excited voices and cast frequent and
armfulse fearful glances out into the surrounding blackness
d high of the night. However, not a suspicious sound
except to nor movement disturbed the camp; and, at last
se watch to the great relief of all, the morning's sun rose
been made above the mountain tops and turned the waters of
e by the the lake into glistening silver.

tain Ken
e night
est of y
et all
ne danger
the more
the name
fright
o peace
comes
assuranc
turned

elid for
ricans wa
ponder on
to solve
and terr
a horri
Thin Chin
ly roast

CHAPTER

XIII



A MIRACULOUS RESCUE

PROFESSOR KENDAL would not allow any one to investigate the horrid mystery of the night, until the bright sunlight had driven the dark shadows out from under the thick-hanging branches of the trees; and then he insisted that he and Captain Kent and Abel Johnson and Cowboy Jim should go first. Dick and Harry and Loretta were permitted to follow a couple of rods behind them. The Mexicans were bidden to remain close to the camp and to stay there, unless they were summoned. Evidently it was from the woods that the mysterious assailant had come; and, therefore, it was the woods to which they now first turned their attention.

"We must move very slowly," Professor Kendal warned, as he formed his line on the edge of the woods, with the men about two rods apart, "and examine every tree top before we pass under it, as well as the ground and every clump of bushes in front of us. If you see anything moving, shoot to kill at once. We can do the examining after-

wards. Now, remember," and he turned to the boys and Loretta, "you are not to follow, until we are at least two rods ahead of you." He glanced along the line and then gave the word to advance into the woods, which formed a belt about a hundred yards wide along one side of the lake, entering them at the spot where Pedro had been killed.

Dick and Harry and Loretta did not at all like being left behind; but, in this case, Professor Kendal's word was law and, therefore, they waited until the men were at least a rod and a half ahead of them and then they, too, started to enter the woods, Loretta walking between the two boys. But they had hardly passed under the over-hanging branches of the first of the trees, when they heard Abel Johnson give a great shout of astonishment and wonder, quickly followed by exclamations of surprise and horror from the others.

"That's dad. He's found something. Come on," and Loretta, with Dick and Harry by her sides, in total disregard of the orders of Professor Kendal, sprang forward, through the thick underbrush that here obstructed the view and impeded progress, in the direction whence her father's voice had come.

The underbrush was so thick that they could not see ten feet ahead, but the excited voices of the men guided them and they plunged and tore their way through the intervening bushes and came suddenly into a little opening, not more than a couple

of rods across. The men were standing near the center of this opening, looking down at something that lay outstretched on the ground.

"What is it?" and Loretta, followed by the boys, sprang to her father's side. "Oh, what a horrible monster!" and the girl shuddered and clung to her father, as her eyes fell on the thing that lay sprawled out and lifeless on the ground.

And well might she shudder to look on such a beast, even when death had rendered it harmless; for there on the ground before her lay a thing that was neither ape nor man, but, seemingly, a gross and terrible combination of both.

The creature, when standing upright, must have been over seven feet tall. The body was hugely proportioned, with enormous shoulders and a great bulging chest. The arms were long and thicker than a large man's leg, with great bony hands. The fingers and the short thick thumbs were armed with bluntly pointed claw-like nails. The enormous legs were bowed out badly and the shape of the feet showed that they were used both for walking and tree-climbing. The head—— It seemed the head of a gorilla and of a brutal savage combined, resulting in features too frightful and horrible, with their look of human intelligence and beast-like brutality, to be described. A short coarse red beard that covered most of the face and hair that fell in a coarse unkempt mop to the shoulders, added to the grotesque terribleness of the creature. Two large fangs, one on each side,

gave a dog-like look to the mouth. The body and arms and legs were covered with thick reddish hair and around the loins hung the skin of a jaguar, that had been rudely fashioned into the shape of a garment. A huge club, with a heavy knotted end, lay on the ground near one of the great outstretched hands. In short the body of what seemed to be an enormous gorilla that had in the process of evolution advanced until it had become almost, if not quite, a human being, lay there on the ground dead.

"But, how did you kill it? I heard no shot," and Dick turned an astonished and horrified face to Abel Johnson.

"We found it dead, with this hole in its head," Abel Johnson answered, pointing to a round red spot just back of the ear, from which the blood had oozed and formed a little pool on the ground. "That rifle shot of yours, fired out into the darkness of the night at the moment you heard the creature scream, must have hit it and killed it instantly. Great snakes, but he must have been the grandfather of all gorillas!" and Abel Johnson's face showed how completely he was mystified by the body of the terrible creature.

"This is a most remarkable discovery." Professor Kendal's face glowed with excitement and enthusiasm. "It will astonish the scientific world. A man-ape and of the gorilla type! The missing link! Something dreamed of by every modern Zoologist; but never before seen. I am tempted

to return with the body at once. But, no, this is but the prelude to yet greater discoveries, an earnest of what is to come. The legends of the Toltecs are full of accounts of terrible manlike apes; and this must be a descendant of one of those prehistoric monsters, that, somehow, has managed to live in these wild and unexplored regions. Now, I'll summon the Mexicans, so that they can see that their devil-man is nothing but a great man—like ape that a rifle bullet can kill, or their superstitious imaginations will transform it into a dreadful demon that will make cowards of them all,” and, lifting his voice, he called to Holy Miguel and his men.

A moment later the Mexicans came tearing excitedly through the bushes; and behind them came Bill Burke and Chin Chink.

“See, there is your devil-man, slain by a bullet from Dick’s rifle,” and Professor Kendal pointed to the dead monster. “You see he can be killed, just like you and I.”

“Santa Maria! Madre de Dios! Only the devil could make a monkey like that!” and Holy Miguel stared in amazement at the body of the ape-man. “But devil, ape or man, I fear it not. I spit on it,” and he bent forward and spat on the ugly thing.

“Here, come and have a look at one of your great-great-great-grandfathers,” and Cowboy Jim, with a wide grin on his face, turned to Bill

Burke, who had cautiously remained in the background.

Bill Burke approached and glared down at the dead body a moment, then, while the wrinkles began jumping furiously all over his face, he turned angrily on Cowboy Jim.

"What fo' yo' call dat big ugly monkey mah grandfathah? I's black; but I's no monkey; an' I done nebber had no monkey fo' mah fathah, or mah grandfathah, or mah great-grandfathah; an' I's not gwine to stand fo' no sech insultimous omnoxity, yo—yo'——"

As this moment Bill Burke's rage, at what he took to be Cowboy Jim's dreadful insult to himself and his ancestry, became too great to express in words; and, suddenly, his two hands went to his chin, his head lowered, and, with an inarticulate roar, he plunged, headfirst, straight for the pit of Cowboy Jim's stomach.

Cowboy Jim stood about a dozen feet from Bill Burke, with legs spread apart and the grin on his face broadening—until Bill Burke's head struck him in the stomach; for the negro had charged with such surprising quickness that he had not had time even to spring aside before the head hit.

Cowboy Jim went down, with a grunt, flat on his back and lay there helpless for a moment, with all the breath knocked out of his body, while Bill Burke stood over him, shaking his head like an angry ram and demanding that he apologize or

have "yo'r belly-button knocked plumb thro' yo' spinal menegetius."

At first Cowboy Jim was very angry and his hand moved toward the butt of his revolver; but, by the time his breath was back in his body, he saw the humor of the affair; and, when he jumped to his feet, there was a grin on his face.

"I reckon I got exactly what was coming to me and I apologize good and plenty," and he extended his hand to Bill Burke. "I shore made some mistake when I said your ancestors was monkeys. I should have said rams," and he grabbed the hand that Bill Burke had extended doubtfully and shook it warmly.

Bill Burke looked doubtful, but returned the shake; and then hurried back to the camp, a dubious look on his face and one hand thoughtfully scratching the top of his woolly head.

Professor Kendal bade the Mexicans dig a grave and bury the huge body; and, when this had been done, he marked the spot, so that he could easily find it again.

"I must take the skeleton at least back with me to the United States," he declared. "It will create a big sensation in the scientific world. We will dig it up when we return. Now we must be on our way, if we would reach the entrance to the chasm guarded by the great bronze owl and the stone tigers today," and, followed by the others, he hastened back to the camp; and a few minutes later the expedition was again on its way.

The valley now began to narrow and its sides to steepen, until soon it was nothing more than a wide mountain canyon, with nearly perpendicular sides. The trail sometimes left the bottom of the canyon and followed narrow shelves of rocks, projecting out from the steep wall-like sides; and once they came to a place where a road-bed a rod wide and nearly a mile long, had been chiseled out of the solid rock in the side of the canyon nearly a hundred feet from its bottom. Guarding each end of this chiseled way, stood two stone tigers, each cut out of a solid block of marble; and midway between the two ends was a deep niche cut in the wall of rock; and in the recess thus formed perched a huge bronze owl, on a splintered bronze stump, with a bronze serpent still writhing in its talons.

"The owl of the inscription!" exclaimed Harry, the moment his eyes fell on the great bird. "Exactly as it is described on the cartouch!" and he sprang off his horse and ran eagerly forward to examine the owl more closely, followed by Dick and Loretta and Professor Kendal, while the others halted their horses and watched with curious eyes from the seats of their saddles.

The niche was cut six feet deep into the rock and was eight feet high by five feet wide. The interior walls were covered with Toltec picture-writing. The owl was so large that, although the stump on which it stood was not more than two feet high, its head was man-high; and so marvel-

ously well had it been preserved throughout the ages that not even one of the delicately cut feathers was marred. Indeed, neither time nor vandal hand had apparently harmed it in any way; and, in a moment more, they were to learn the reason why.

Harry was the first to reach the niche; and he at once stepped inside to examine the great bird more closely. The instant his foot touched the floor of the niche, the great staring round eyes, made out of glass-like substance and colored in exact imitation of owl eyes, began to roll slowly in their sockets, the head moved threateningly forward, and then, suddenly, when directly in front of Harry's startled face, the great beak opened and a shrill, ear-piercing shriek came from the bronze mouth.

Harry was so badly frightened that he jumped about six feet backward, colliding with Dick so violently that both boys went over backward to the ground. Loretta screamed and ran to where her father sat on his horse. Even Professor Kendal took a quick step backward. Then he laughed.

"A wonderful mechanical contrivance," he said. "See," and he stepped forward to the niche and, placing one of his feet on the floor directly in front of the owl, pressed his weight on it.

The eyes of the owl at once began to roll, the head thrust itself threateningly forward and, suddenly, as before, the great beak opened and again the piercing shriek rang out.

"You see," continued the Professor, turning to the somewhat crest-fallen boys with a smile, "the weight of the body, pressing down on the block of stone directly in front of the bird, sets the machinery in motion that causes the bronze owl apparently to suddenly come to life," and again he bore down with his weight on the block of stone; and again the eyes rolled, the head was thrust forward, the beak opened and the shriek pierced the ears. "No wonder the ignorant and superstitious savages have let the bird alone," and he smiled at the thought of what must have happened, when some big and curious savage stepped inside the niche to examine the wonderful bird. "But," and his face suddenly lit up with interest, "how does it happen that the machinery is in such perfect working order after all these ages?" and, falling down on his knees inside the niche, he began carefully examining the stone block that set the bird in motion.

The block was about two feet square and fitted so nicely into the solid rock, into which the niche had been cut, that only the closest scrutiny could discover the joining. The dirt in the minute crack that separated the block from the surrounding rock had been recently cleaned out. This could be seen by the slight and recently made scratches along the edge of the rock. There was an oddly shaped hole in the bronze stump on which the owl perched, that was evidently a keyhole to a lock that held the block in place; for, in spite of their utmost

efforts (Cowboy Jim and Abel Johnson and the boys had now joined the Professor), they could not move the block an iota from its place.

"You see there has been someone, who, throughout all these ages, has kept the machinery of the bronze owl in working order," and Professor Kendal's face showed how deeply this astonishing discovery had moved him. "Do you realize what that means?" and he straightened up, a look of triumph on his face. "There must be human beings living near here, who know the secret of the bronze owl and who have sufficient intelligence to care for its machinery; and what is more reasonable than to suppose that they are direct descendants of the Toltecs and that the secret has been handed down from generation to generation, as well as the duty of caring for its machinery. Certainly no savages could have ever kept the owl in working order. Now, let us see if I can make out the meaning of any of the picture-writings covering the walls. Possibly they will give us enlightenment," and he at once became completely absorbed in the study of the queer characters carved in the rock of the walls, while the others awaited the result with impatient eagerness.

At the end of a quarter of an hour Professor Kendal looked up from the note-book, in which he had been recording the results of his study, the light of a great hope and triumph on his face.

"This roadway and this shrine, for to the Toltecs it was a sort of a religious shrine," he

explained, "was built by the high priest, Quauhtl, to commemorate the saving of himself and followers from the wrath of the water god, who had suddenly sent a raging torrent sweeping down this canyon for the purpose of destroying them, by the miraculous projecting of a narrow shelf of rock out of the perpendicular wall of the canyon, along which they had journeyed in safety high above the flood. The date of this marvelous occurrence is given as 1062, A. D., as nearly as it can be translated into our calendar, which, according to the best authorities we have, was the year the last king of the Toltecs and his followers, under the guidance of a high priest named Quauhtl, fled southward and disappeared from history. This is another wonderful corroboration of the inscription found on the cartouch of gold; and tells us that we are surely on the right trail," and Professor Kendal's face fairly glowed with excitement and enthusiasm, as he sprang on his horse and hurriedly set the expedition again in motion.

"He shore has got me milling," Cowboy Jim remarked to Loretta and the boys, as they again got under way. "I am getting plumb anxious to get within roping distance of them Toltecs, though I can't just savvy how he calculates on finding any of them alive, after they've been dead for so many centuries," and he grinned. "But it shore is some interesting and exciting, as Locoed Bill said when his bronc bucked him on top of a cactus— Jee-ru-salem! Look there!" and Cowboy Jim's eyes

turned suddenly upward, to where a rock, some twenty feet above their heads, projected a little ways out over the road, and on which a Mexican bighorn had suddenly appeared and now stood trembling on its verge.

"Hist!" and Cowboy Jim began excitedly unfastening his rope. "He's my meat. I'll rope him," and he swung his loosened rope around his head.

At that moment the bighorn, driven by some terrible danger behind him and blind to what was in front, leaped straight out from the rock.

Loretta screamed; for the bighorn was coming straight down toward the spot where she sat on her horse. Bonny saw the danger and gave a tremendous jump sideways, to the verge of the precipice; and then, before any one could see just how it happened, Loretta was flung off his back and over the precipice, where the fall was a hundred feet or more straight down to the jagged rocks at the bottom.

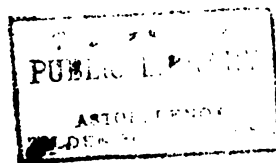
There seemed no possible way of saving her!

But, before her scream of deadly fear had left her lips and while all the others sat paralyzed with horror on their horses, Cowboy Jim, with his arm nerved to lightning action by the deadly peril of Loretta, partly turned in his saddle toward her and cast his rope with all his strength and skill, even as Loretta plunged downward head first.

Minutes seemed to pass to the horror-stricken, watching eyes before the swift rope and the falling



BIGHORN WAS COMING STRAIGHT DOWN TOWARD THE PLACE WHERE
SHE SAT ON HER HORSE



girl met; and, for a year of horror, they watched while the noose slipped over her head, over her body——

Good God, she was falling through it!

Then suddenly the rope tightened around her ankles and held.

For a terrible moment, it seemed as if the jerk that Loretta's suddenly arrested weight gave to the rope, would pull Cowboy Jim and his horse, which was not rope-trained, over the precipice with her. But the sight of those terrible depths nerved the horse to desperate efforts; and, in a moment more, the strong hands of Abel Johnson and Professor Kendal and the two boys had hold of the rope; and Loretta was quickly pulled to the safety of the road.

Abel Johnson was trembling like a leaf and the tears were rolling down his cheeks, when, at last, he caught his "little gal" up in his arms and held her close; and even Professor Kendal was white under his beard and his huge frame was trembling.

Loretta was unharmed; and soon, with the quick reaction of youth, was her joyous, impulsive self again. The moment she could escape from her father's embraces, she flung her arms around Cowboy Jim's neck and impulsively kissed him again and again.

"That's right, squeeze the life out of the old sinner. He deserves it," and Abel Johnson, the tears still in his eyes and his voice a bit husky, slapped Cowboy Jim on the back with one of his

hands. "Great God, man, but that was some throw!" and again his big hand fell on Cowboy Jim's back.

"It was," and Professor Kendal stretched out his hand to Cowboy Jim. "But greater than the throw was the ability to see and do the right thing, the only possible thing, in the smallest fraction of a second; and here is my hand on it," and Professor Kendal's fingers closed round the hand of Cowboy Jim, in a grip that made him wince.

"Oh, shucks!" and Cowboy Jim, who was still a little white, laughed a little huskily. "'Twon't nothing like roping a wild steer around his hind jumpers—— Oh, say, Professor," and a flood of red came into the embarrassed man's face, "don't you think we had better be getting after them Toltecs, without any more splashings of red paint?"

"We had," laughed the Professor; and at once gave the order to advance.

The sun had just sank behind the western mountain tops, when, at last, our friends halted at the entrance to the mysterious chasm, where still hovered the great bronze owl and the huge stone tiger still kept their silent vigils, even as they had been doing for nearly a thousand years. They were now on the very threshold of the Great Adventure.



A NIGHT OF HORROR

THERE was no moon; and, in that deep mountain valley, the darkness of night came so swiftly, that already, when our friends arrived at the chasm, it was too dark to do any exploring or to examine the bronze owl that night.

"In the morning, as soon as it is light, I will have a look into that old bird," Dick declared, the moment he was off his horse and his eyes had fallen on the bronze owl.

"But not to-night," laughed Harry. "Well, I won't blame you; for of all the spooky places I have seen or heard of, this is the spookiest," and he glanced apprehensively in the direction of the stone tigers and the great bronze bird, that still could be dimly seen outlined in the fast-gathering darkness. "And when I think of what happened at this very spot last year——"

"Ugh! Shut up! or I'll stuff my blanket down your mouth," and Dick raised his blanket that he had just taken off his horse, threateningly. "Don't you think I want to sleep to-night?"

"Sleep? I'm sure I'll not sleep a wink to-night. The thought of the Scalp-Pullers will——"

Harry stopped abruptly, for Dick's heavy blanket had descended suddenly and with force on his head and shoulders.

Loretta, who came up at this moment, laughingly extricated him and sternly bade the boys behave themselves and help her get the saddle off Bonny, for the hind latigo-strap had become so tight that she could not unfasten it.

Both boys hastened to obey; and soon the three were joking and laughing together, as they relieved Bonny of his saddle.

This time Professor Kendal did not pitch the camp under the overhanging branches of the great trees, where he and his men had been so easily captured last year; but out in the open, where there was not a rock or a shrub or a tree to conceal an enemy.

Holy Miguel and his men on this night, for the first time, showed uneasiness; and, when their work was done, they gathered in a group close to the camp-fire and talked in low excited tones, with frequent and apprehensive glances out into the surrounding darkness in the direction of the stone tigers and the bronze owl and also in the direction of the Americanos. Evidently, notwithstanding their boasted freedom from all fear and superstition, the place was casting its spell of dread and horror over them; or, at least, such was the in-

terpretation given to their action by Professor Kendal and the others—until afterwards.

The Americans themselves were far from being free from uneasiness. They remembered only too vividly what had occurred in this very place the year before, when Professor Kendal had made his first attempt to enter the ruins of the old Toltec city; and, although the hideous Scalp Pullers themselves were said to have been all killed, a dreadful apprehension of what might happen before the dawning of another sun was trembling in each bosom.

As for Bill Burke and Chin Chink, nothing could induce either of them to pass outside of the circle of light made by the camp-fires and their eyes were continually turning toward the spot, where they had last seen the great bronze owl before the darkness of night had blotted it out. At every unusual sound they jumped; and then, when nothing happened, they would look at each other accusingly, as if each were condemning the other of cowardice. At last the vivid negro imagination of Bill Burke, an imagination that delighted in horrors, could no longer keep silent.

"Hay, yo' Chin Chink," and he turned to the Chinaman, who sat on his blanket, his feet curled up under him like a Turk, watching a kettle of coca that hung simmering over the fire, "yo' done seed dat gigantus ob an owl, wid dé red eyes an' de great beak, dat am hoverin' ober de entrance

to dat chasm, a-waitin' fo' to gobble up one ob us to-night?"

"Yes, Billee Burkee, me see owl," and Chin Chink turned his eyes from the kettle of coca to where Bill Burke sat on a rock a few feet away, carefully cleaning and oiling Dick's rifle. "Velly bigee owl. Alla samee no eat Chinaman. No likee. Makee bellee ache plenty bad. He likee black meat, alla samee Billee Burkee, plenty good, topside, you sabee?" and Chin Chink smiled blandly.

"An' yo' know what happened when Massah Professah Kendal am heah last yeah, right whar we am now?" Bill Burke continued, ignoring Chin Chink's reference to black meat, while the wrinkles on his face began jumping around alarmingly. "Dat dar debbel owl done suddenly come to libe, an' de great head look like it am filled wid green fiah, an' red flames shoot out of the big eyes, an' de great beak open an' yell, like it am callin' to all de debbels ob hell; an' den somethin' big an' black an' softlike drop right down out ob de skies on top ob dem, an' de next thing dey knowed de Scalp-Pullers was a-cuttin' de top ob dar heads off—Gawd A'mighty!" and Bill Burke clapped his hand to his neck and whirled wildly around, his eyes rolling in their sockets like marbles, to find Holy Miguel standing a pace away and grinning. A long feather-like fern, damp and cold with moisture, in his hand, told what it was that had given Bill Burke such a terrible fright, when he

felt something cold and clammy suddenly touch his neck.

"Santa Maria, but you jump quick!" and Holy Miguel stepped back a pace at sight of Bill Burke's face. "Jesus in heaven! I did not mean to so frighten you, pardon," and he bowed humbly, yet with a crafty leering look in his eyes, to the now thoroughly angered negro.

The bow and the apology mollified Bill Burke's anger. He was not accustomed to have any one bow to him and ask his pardon.

"I's done pardon yo' dis time," he said magnanimously; "but fo' Gawd, if yo' eber done come sneakin' up ahind dis niggah dat away again, I's gwine to get mad, I's gwine to get right smart mad an' somethin' is gwine to happen to yo' mighty sudden. Now, what yo' want?"

"May the Holy Virgin protect us and bring us safely out of this unholy place!" and Holy Miguel crossed himself. "I did but come to ask if you could spare a little, a very little coca, to put courage and strength in the hearts of my men on this terrible night, when devils are all around us," and again he crossed himself, as he stepped toward the kettle of coca simmering over the fire and held out a small pail that he carried in one hand.

"Help yo' selb. Help yo' selb," and Bill Burke pointed to the kettle.

Holy Miguel stepped quickly to the fire, a gleam of triumph in his eyes; but, before his hand could touch the kettle, Chin Chink's hand interposed.

"No touchee, no touchee," he said. "Me get cocce," and he reached out his hand for the pail.

Holy Miguel frowned, but gave him the pail, stepping closer to the kettle of coca, as he did so.

Chin Chink took the pail and filled it and handed it back to Holy Miguel—and gave a jump that landed him a good ten feet away, his face a chalky yellow with fear; for at that moment a hideously wild shriek came from out the black darkness of the night where the great bronze owl was hidden.

All sprang to their feet, their weapons held ready for instant use and their eyes fixed on the spot in the darkness whence that dreadful sound had seemed to come—all but Holy Miguel. He, at the moment when all eyes were fixed in one direction and away from the camp, stepped swiftly to the kettle of coca, one hand hovered over the kettle for a moment, while something white and powdery dropped into it; then, stepping quickly away from the kettle, his eyes, too, became fixed on the darkness, whence had come that fearful sound, while his face assumed a look of fear and dread and his right hand half drew his knife from its sheath.

For many minutes all stood thus, staring out into the black darkness, expecting each moment to see the great bronze owl flame up and to hear once again that dreadful shriek. But not another sound did they hear and the darkness remained unbroken.

"It must have been a jaguar's scream," and the tenseness of Professor Kendal's watchfulness re-

laxed. "But I thought it had a human note in it," and a puzzled, troubled look came on his face. "We must treble the guard to-night; for I fear," he added in a lower voice to Captain Kent, "that all the Scalp-Pullers have not been killed. Captain Kent and I will stand guard over the camp all night, while Dick and Harry and one of the Mexicans guard the horses, until two o'clock in the morning, then Cowboy Jim and Abel Johnson and another Mexican will take their places. And mark you," he added sharply, "there must not be an instant's relaxation of your watchfulness, or the life of every one in camp may be imperiled. Now," and he turned to the kettle of coca, while his great frame straightened and his eyes lighted up, "let us drink to the confusion of our enemies and to the success of the expedition," and he motioned to Chin Chink, who removed the coca from the fire and brought cups and filled them with the steaming hot beverage.

"May we all have pleasant dreams to-night and be ready for the adventures of the morrow, whatever they may be!" and Professor Kendal lifted his cup of coca to his lips; and all the other Americans, including Bill Burke and Chin Chink, did the same; and then all slowly drained their cups.

This was a little formality gone through with every night, just before retiring and the posting of the guard and had not been omitted a single night since the expedition started.

Holy Miguel had by now returned with his coca to the camp-fire of the Mexicans; and they, too, in mock imitation of the Americans, drank their coca.

"Now, let every one who is not to stand guard get to bed," and Professor Kendal set down his cup and turned to Captain Kent to make the arrangements for the night.

Dick and Harry at once procured their rifles, carefully examining them and their revolvers to see that they were properly loaded and ready for action; and then, accompanied by a Mexican named Juan, they went to where the animals had been rudely corralled a few rods away from the camp proper.

"Be sure and not let the horrid Scalp-Pullers get Bonny," Loretta called laughingly after the boys, as she and her father turned to enter her tent.

"Only over our dead bodies, can they reach Bonny," Harry laughed back.

The corral consisted of a large rope, breast high to a horse, strung through rings in the heads of iron stakes driven down into the ground, and enclosed a circular space large enough to hold all the animals.

The boys and Juan stationed themselves around this enclosure at equal intervals. Their instructions were for each to walk his beat and meet each of the other guards at least every quarter of an hour and to shoot to kill at any suspicious object seen approaching.

Dick and Harry had often stood guard at night; but never before under such nerve-racking circumstances. When doing guard-duty in the Indian country, they knew the kind of danger to expect; and, terrible as it was, were prepared to meet it. But here, in this mysterious mountain valley, hidden away in the wildest portion of unexplored Mexico, at the gateway to the ages-old ruins of the Toltec city, now the dwelling-place of devils, according to the superstitious natives, with the red eyes of the great bronze owl and the cold glare of the stone tigers upon them and with the knowledge of what had happened here to Professor Kendal and his men the year before sending cold chills to their hearts, they knew not what to expect, knew not what danger to be on their guard against, knew not even whether or not it would be a mortal danger that they could meet with human weapons.

"Say," Dick confessed frankly, as they met the second time since beginning their guard-duty, "the mystery and the darkness of this dreadful place must be getting on my nerves or something. I never felt so queer before in my life."

"Same here," admitted Harry. "I can't seem to think of anything but spooks. And once, when a little gust of wind blew a wet leaf against my face, I almost screamed in my sudden fright. I was never as nervous before as that. And yet, in spite of all this, which would seem to be enough to keep any one wide awake, I am beginning to feel

so drowsy that I can hardly keep my eyes open. I don't understand it. Why—why Dick, what is the matter?" and he reached out an unsteady hand toward Dick, whose head had suddenly fell forward, as his body slumped slowly to the ground. "Why—why, Dick, we must not fall asleep while on guard, something terrible might happen. Dick—I——" and the unfortunate boy sank down by the side of Dick and into unconsciousness.

Holy Miguel's powder, once started, did its work suddenly.

A few minutes later Juan and another Mexican, their unsheathed knives in their hand, crept cautiously through the darkness up to where the boys lay breathing heavily.

"They are like the dead, the dogs of Americans," Juan said, as, holding his knife ready to strike, he reached out with the other hand and shook Dick by the shoulder. "If I were ordering this business, I would cut their pig throats right now and be done with it. But, no, Holy Miguel says we must first carry them into the devil-city and so slay them that, should the soldiers of Diaz come to see if we tell a true story of their dreadful murder in the devil-city, they will find their bodies; and thus shall we escape the punishment. Ah, but Holy Miguel is the cunning one! How easily he slipped the powder that brings the death-like sleep into the coca under their stupid noses; and then how foolishly the stupids drank it, every

one of them, even the big black buck, who bunts, and the pig-tailed one. The saints surely must help Holy Miguel. Now we must truss up these young bucks and carry them to the camp. I am anxious to see if things have gone as well with the others," and straightway the two men tightly bound the legs and arms of Dick and Harry and, tossing them up on their shoulders, bore them into the camp and dumped them down on the ground, between the two camp-fires, where already lay the bodies of the other Americans, all strongly bound and still insensible from the drug.



THE AVENUE OF GREAT OWLS

PROFESSOR KENDAL was the first to recover consciousness. He was lying face downward; and, after moving about uneasily for a moment, he attempted to roll over. The action told him that something was wrong with his arms and legs. At first he could not comprehend what it was. Then, suddenly, as his brain cleared, came the dreadful realization that he was bound hand and foot. He started violently, flopped over on his back—and looked up into the grinning face of Holy Miguel, who stood looking down on him, Professor Kendal's rifle in his hand and Professor Kendal's belt, with its revolver and knife, around his waist.

For a moment Professor Kendal was too bewildered and dumbfounded by the situation to move or speak; but lay staring blankly up into the grinning evil face.

"May the Holy Virgin give you a pleasant day, after sleep so deep and refreshing, Señor Professor," and Holy Miguel's grin became a leer of triumph. "See, the sun already is shining down

into the valley," and he pointed to where the sun's disk showed a half-hour above the eastern mountain tops. "For a time I feared very much that you and your friends awake not in time to go to-day to the devil-city of the Toltecs, which would be a too great disappointment for the Señor Professor. Now, will I awake the others," and he turned to Cowboy Jim, who lay face down and breathing heavily, next to Professor Kendal and gave him a vigorous kick in the ribs.

"You blamed rhinoceros, quit your punching," Cowboy Jim grunted wrathfully and attempted to roll over—lay still a moment and then, with a violent start, jerked himself over on his back and looked up into the evil face of Holy Miguel, who was enjoying himself immensely. A moment he lay staring in utter dumbfoundment, then came sudden realization of what had happened.

"Buncoed, by the horned snakes. And by Greasers!" he almost yelled, utter disgust, as well as rage, in his voice and looks.

"Si, señor," grinned Holy Miguel. "'Tis a great game, this bunco. I have played it before with Americanos, in Arizona; but never with ones so stupid. Now must I awaken the others. You Americanos sleep like hogs," and he gave the attention of his foot to the other bound sleepers.

It had been a real relief to Professor Kendal, when he flopped over on his back and found himself looking up into the eyes of Holy Miguel; for the first thought that had flashed into his mind,

when he discovered that he was bound, was that again he was in the hands of the Scalp-Pullers. Holy Miguel was bad enough; but the Scalp-Pullers! Doubtless it would take a huge wedge of American gold to pry Holy Miguel's fingers loose; but then that was what gold was for, to buy something, and what more precious than life could be bought? and he smiled philosophically.

Alas, not yet did Professor Kendal know Holy Miguel!

When Holy Miguel, or, rather, his foot, had awakened all, he again turned to Professor Kendal, the sneering grin still on his face.

"Now will we go to the devil-city," he said. "See, all is ready," and he waved his hand in the direction of the loaded pack-train and the saddled and bridled horses that stood lined up and ready for instant departure. "But now the Americanos will walk and we will ride; for too much riding is not good for strong men," and he smiled.

Professor Kendal had been studying Holy Miguel and the situation. He was not worrying about their lives. He did not think Holy Miguel would dare to harm them, with the fear of President Diaz in his heart. But the delay, when he stood on the very threshold of his Great Adventure, that was aggravating. They must come to terms at once, to Holy Miguel's terms, he could not afford to waste time haggling over the price of their freedom.

"Well," he said, and smiled, "you certainly are

a cunning old fox. But, what is the game? Money, I suppose. We acknowledge defeat and bow to fate. What is your price? We must come to an agreement promptly. You want gold. We want freedom. I have the gold and will buy our freedom. I am in haste and will not haggle over the amount. How much must it be?" He paused and waited for Holy Miguel to reply.

But Holy Miguel only stood and smiled.

"You will have nothing to fear. No harm shall come to you or your men because of this little joke," and again Professor Kendal smiled. "Name your price, anything within reason; and the gold shall be paid to you by my own hand the day we return to Mexico City, and no tales told. Come, now, how much is it?" He was becoming impatient.

Still Holy Miguel stood and smiled; and there was more in his smile to chill the heart than in any words he might have spoken.

"Come, let's have an end to this melodrama," Professor Kendal spoke impatiently. "We acknowledge we are in your power and will pay the price. What more do you want?"

"In the dead city, where the devils dwell, we will speak more. Now is not the time," and Holy Miguel turned abruptly away from Professor Kendal and called out a number of sharp orders to his men.

Instantly all were in motion; and, in a very short time, notwithstanding their emphatic protests, our

friends found themselves, with hands still bound behind their backs, but with legs free, being marched on foot toward the entrance to the mysterious chasm, while Holy Miguel and his men, armed with their weapons, rode triumphantly and jeeringly by their sides.

"Well, we are at least going to the Toltec ruins and that is something," and Professor Kendal smiled philosophically; and then became so completely absorbed in the stone tigers and the great bronze owl and the picture-writing on the walls that he practically forgot his unfortunate condition for the time being.

"Sorry, old bird," and Dick glanced up at the great bronze owl, with a grin, as he, with Loretta and Harry by his side, passed under it, "that I can't call on you this morning, as I planned, owing to unforeseen circumstances; but I'll promise to make that visit at the very first opportunity. See there," and he nodded his head a little excitedly toward the right side of the chasm, where a series of steps cut in the wall ran upward to within easy reach of one of the great wings, "that is how they get into the great bird. I knew there was some way of climbing up to it. Well, so-long old bird, till we meet again," and he hurried on, as he noticed one of the Mexicans making toward them with quirt held threateningly.

Holy Miguel and the other Mexicans, notwithstanding their boast that they were not afraid of all the devils the old Toltec city could spout forth,

showed considerable trepidation when it came to passing under the great bronze owl. They crossed themselves and glanced shudderingly upward and hurried the horses they were riding, until all were safely from under the great bird; and, even then, they cast frequent shuddering glances back over their shoulders, as if they were fearful it might yet do them harm.

The chasm ran straight ahead for nearly half a mile, with almost perpendicular walls of rock two hundred feet high in places. Evidently it had been made by some tremendous convulsion of nature many thousands of years ago. The walls on both sides of the chasm to the height of about ten feet were covered with picture-writing and quaint figures cut in the rock, the most common of these figures being an owl, perched on a lightning-splintered stump, with a writhing serpent in its talons. The carving was not rudely done, but frequently showed great skill and artistic ability.

"The history of a great city and people is recorded here," Professor Kendal exclaimed excitedly; and, unable to keep his archeological enthusiasm within prison bounds, he rushed up to an especially fine specimen of carving, all forgetful that he was a bound captive, and started in to examine it with an interest so absorbing that he forgot everything else—until, suddenly, Holy Miguel's quirt cut sharply across his shoulders.

Professor Kendal whirled furiously around; and, for an instant, the muscles in his great frame

swelled, as he strained violently to break the thongs that bound his hands behind his back, and there came a look on his face and in his eyes that caused Holy Miguel suddenly to pull his horse backward, out of reach of those great arms, should they win freedom. But the thongs held; and, in a moment, the Professor, realizing the folly of his rage, became his calm philosophical self again; but the hard glint remained in his eyes.

"If you hit me again with that quirt, I'll kill you some day," he said quietly, speaking slowly and emphasizing each word. "Americans are not dogs," and he turned his back abruptly on Holy Miguel and strode back to his place in the line.

"Si, Señor Professor," and Holy Miguel bowed his head mockingly to the Professor's retreating back; "and yet will I wager ten good American dollars, that you die first, even though I make my mark again on your back with my whip, as I of a certainty will, if you make delay again by stopping to stare, like one big idiot, at those foolish things that a foolish people, who seem not to have had anything better to do, cut on these walls so long ago that no one knows even their name. And Señor Professor," his voice hardened, "I now am master and you Americanos are dogs; to whip, if I like; or kick, if I like; or kill, if the dogs get ugly and show their teeth and try to bite——"

"Oh, stinking skunks! Somebody rope that locoed steer and stop his bellerin'!" and Cowboy Jim, who was walking near Holy Miguel, turned

a pair of eyes blazing with disgust and rage up to the Mexican's face. "No lying, thieving, murdering Greaser shall call——"

"Look out!" screamed Loretta.

But she was an instant too late; for, as the words of warning left her lips, the Mexican, who rode on the other side of Cowboy Jim from Holy Miguel and who had suddenly leaned over sideways in his saddle toward him, swung the handle of his quirt down with all the strength of his right arm.

The blow struck Cowboy Jim over the mouth; but, fortunately, the quirt handle is short and this particular handle was not "loaded" with lead, as they usually are, but made of tightly bound and twisted strips of leather; or Cowboy Jim's jaw would have been broken by the blow. Even as it was, his lips were badly cut and two of his front teeth loosened and his temper completely ruined. With a bull-like roar of rage, he whirled around and, bound as he was, would have sprang upon the Mexican, whose hand had gone swiftly to his knife, had not Professor Kendal suddenly thrust his great bulk between the two.

"Back," he commanded sternly. "Keep your temper under control. Our turn will yet come. Now we are helpless; and resistance only brings punishment. Some day," and he turned his eyes to the face of Holy Miguel, "you will pay for this."

"Si, Señor Professor, some day," smiled back Holy Miguel. "Some day; but, now, you pay.

March on," and he turned to his men. "If the dogs make more trouble, use the whip."

The Americans wisely made no more "trouble"; and walked on in close-lipped silence.

At the end of the half mile the chasm turned widely, like the crook of a half-bent elbow, and a couple of rods farther it came to an abrupt end in a great valley.

The moment our little company had made this turn, all stopped in astonishment; for they stood looking down one of the most remarkable vistas ever given to the eyes of man to see. Straight before them for a mile ran a great avenue of gigantic owls, chiseled out of a mottled grayish stone, that gave a striking semblance to the natural colors of owls to the great figures, and standing on huge pedestals of black basalt. The owls were uniform in size; and, as nearly as one might measure them with the eyes, stood, with their great beaks at least twenty feet above the roadway that ran between the two rows of black pedestals. The pedestals themselves were great square blocks of black basalt, each about the height of a man above the roadway. The great birds stood at regular intervals of about sixty feet, a hundred of them on each side of the avenue and all in perfect alignment. Their necks were outstretched over the way and the great round eyes stared downward, as if it were their duty to closely scrutinize all who passed below them. And thus for untold centuries had these great birds stood, grim and silent

watchers while a nation rose and fell and vanished from the face of the earth.

For minutes no one spoke, no one moved; but all stood staring at the great owls and marveling at the solemn grandeur and the weird beauty of this strangest of all avenues builded by the hands of man, marveling at the uniqueness of the genius that could conceive and the tremendous power that could execute so remarkable and gigantic a spectacle. And there was not a heart, American, Mexican, Negro or Chinese, that did not feel the spell of the silence and wildness and remoteness and lonesomeness that brooded over these stupendous ruins of a dead and forgotten past.

"This alone is worth many times the cost of our coming." Professor Kendal spoke almost reverently and his face and eyes glowed. "Egypt has nothing grander or more awesome to show than this Avenue of Great Owls. What will the archeological world say when I report this extraordinary discovery?" Evidently the Professor had absolutely forgotten his perilous situation and that the chances were rather against his having an opportunity to report anything to the archeological world or any other world. "After this sight, who can doubt that we are on the verge of most wonderful discoveries?"

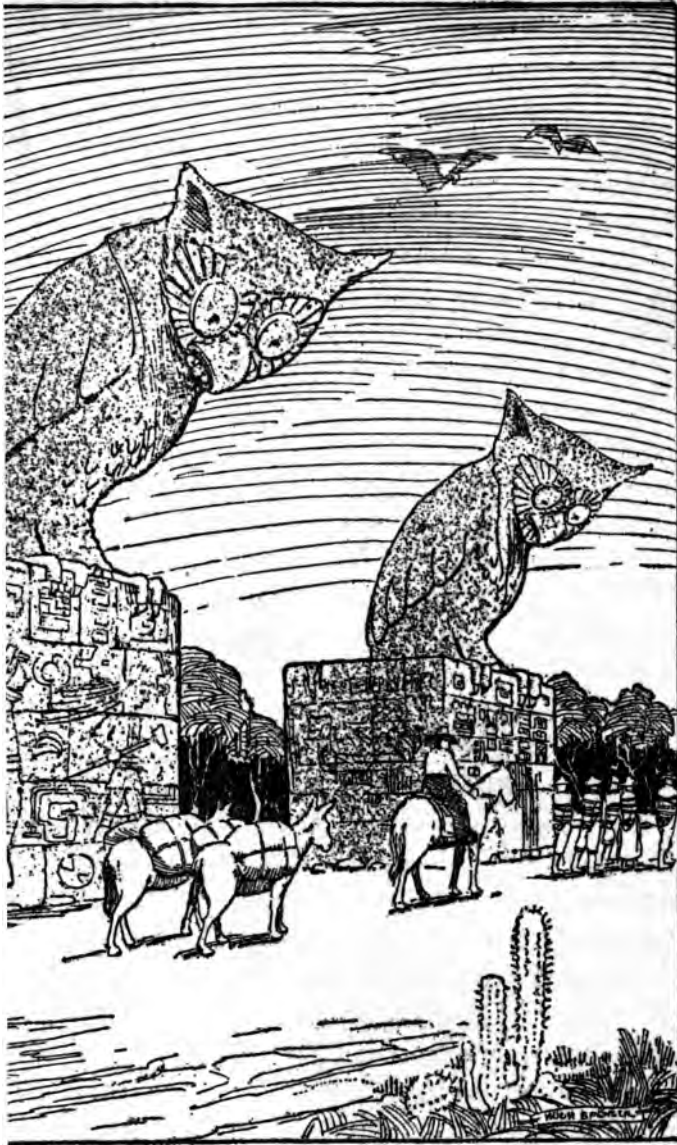
"Si, Señor Professor, there you spoke most true words," and the sneering smile on Holy Miguel's face broadened; "for most wonderful discoveries you of a certainty soon will make, much more

wonderful than these big owls, who are but stone and tell only of the foolishness of a people who are gone. But already have we wasted too much time staring like idiots on this big foolishness," and he turned to his men and sharply gave orders to advance.

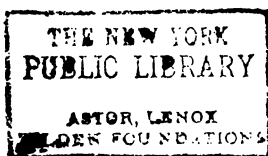
Holy Miguel's words broke the spell that the giant owls had cast over all, Americans as well as Mexicans; and the little company at once got into motion again.

The journey down this awesome avenue, between the two rows of huge solemn birds and underneath their outstretched beaks, with their big round eyes staring down at them, was made almost in silence. Now and then Loretta uttered a subdued exclamation of girl-like astonishment and wonder, or Dick or Harry expressed their amazement, or a Mexican called upon a saint or mumbled a prayer; but the greater part of the distance was passed in awed silence. Bill Burke never opened his mouth during the entire journey; and he kept carefully between Dick and Harry and just behind Professor Kendal; and his eyes were continually rolling upward toward the great owls, with a peculiar shuddering motion that was transmitted to the queerly moving wrinkles on his face. Even Holy Miguel was awed into silence; and not an oath, not the name of a saint escaped his lips while he rode down the Avenue of Great Owls.

The avenue ended in a large, open, half-circular space in front of the ruins of an enormous build-



OURNEY DOWN THIS AWESOME AVENUE WAS MADE ALMOST IN SILENCE



This open space had evidently been a sort of forum, for the ruins of a number of rostrums the remains of statues were still to be seen. To the right and to the left, everywhere, were the ruins of great buildings; and, in the distance, the overgrown top of a pyramid could be seen. But Holy Miguel gave their eyes little time to dwell on these reminders of the glories that had been. Straight across the forum he led them, to where a huge doorway, now in ruins, gave entrance to the great pile already mentioned. As they passed in through this ruined opening, Loretta shuddered and drew yet closer to her father. "Ugh!" she exclaimed. "The air feels like that of a tomb and—and smells like one." "Si, señorita," and Holy Miguel, who rode near, looked down at the American girl, "you speak well. 'Tis the chill of death you feel; and you will die. This is one grand tomb. See, I will show you," and, springing lightly from his horse, he made two of his most trusted men to come with him and the others to remain where they were. "Follow me," and he turned to the Americans and led the way through another and smaller doorway into a great chamber, to which the one they had first entered was but an anteroom.



CHAPTER • XVI •



FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH

THE room they were now in was very large, at least two hundred feet long by a hundred feet wide. The roof had long since fallen; but a number of great marble pillars that manifestly had supported the roof, still remained. The walls showed evidences of having been richly decorated and there were numerous shrine-like niches and recesses, in some of which statues were still to be seen. One end of the room terminated in a great apselike space, in the center of which stood a magnificently designed altar, cut out of a snow-white marble and richly carved with symbolical and religious designs and exquisitely rendered figures. The altar was very large and had been cut out of a single enormous block of marble. At each side of the altar stood a statue of a more than humanly tall and beautifully proportioned and noble-featured man, clothed in long gracefully flowing white robes, with hair falling to the shoulders and bound with a jeweled circlet of gold. Each right arm held to the lips a long and gracefully formed

trumpet of pure gold; and the cheeks were puffed out in the act of blowing.

The eyes of our friends on entering these ruins, which were evidently that of a great temple, first fell on this altar; and there they remained, charmed and awed by its marvelous beauty.

For a couple of minutes Holy Miguel, an evil smile on his lips and a triumphant glitter in his eyes, stood watching them. Then his face hardened and the smile left his lips and he stepped quickly to the side of Professor Kendal and laid his two hands on his shoulders.

"One grand tomb, is it not? The dead are there. Look!" and he swiftly whirled the Professor about and pointed to the center of the great room.

All turned around at the words of Holy Miguel; and a gasp of horror came from between each pair of whitening lips.

Directly in the center of the great chamber, on a strong rudely carved wooden platform that raised it some four feet above the floor, stood a hideous stone image, that all instantly recognized as the horrible god of the Scalp-Pullers, to whom Professor Kendal had been so nearly sacrificed. In front of the god, on its four heavy wooden standards, lay the dreadful black stone of sacrifice, on which Professor Kendal's men had been so cruelly murdered and from which he had so narrowly escaped.

But the thing that had caused that shuddering

gasp of horror was not the god, hideous as it was, nor yet the horrible black stone of sacrifice, hollowed out by the struggles of its thousands of victims; but the shriveled black thing that lay stretched out on the stone and the shriveled black things that lay piled up on the floor around the god and the stone.

"Thus the great President Diaz avenges the wrongs to his good friend, the Señor Professor," and the smile of Holy Miguel was like the grin of a wolf when about to bite. "I know, for I was with his soldiers, when they slew the Pullers of Scalps and placed them here, with their hairless god, and bound the high priest still living to his own stone of sacrifice and left him there for his god to save. All else we were commanded to harm not; for the great Americano, the good friend of President Diaz, was to come again to make a study of the ruins. Even was it forbidden to speak of what we saw, lest some other stone-reader learn of the ruined city and go there before the great Americano, the good friend of President Diaz, returned." Holy Miguel paused, as if to let the full horrors of the scene sink into the minds of the Americans.

And, indeed, it was a hideous and gruesome spectacle. On the floor, all around the god, lay, in a great pile, one on top of the other, all that was left of the Scalp-Pullers. The flesh, owing to some peculiarity of the air, had not rotted, but had shriveled up, until the skin clung tightly to the

bones, making out of each body a horribly grinning mummy. There must have been at least five hundred bodies of men, women and children in that hideous pile.

For a minute Holy Miguel stood enjoying the speechless horror of the Americans, then again he turned to Professor Kendal; and now an unholy greed flamed in his eyes.

"Not at all have you fooled us, me and my men, with your big talk of exploring ruined cities, Señor Professor," and Holy Miguel thrust his face within two feet of the face of Professor Kendal. "Only for one thing will the Americanos suffer such hardships and face such perils—gold. They all are gold-hogs. I know, for I have lived with the Americanos. Now," and he shoved his face to within a foot of the face of Professor Kendal, "I would know where this great treasure of these dead peoples is hidden, the treasure that you, at so great peril, have come twice to find. You show; and you and your Americanos go free. You not show; and my men will kill you all and throw your bodies on top of the rotting pile of Pullers of Scalps. Speak quickly; for I and my men would not be in this devil-dwelling city when comes the darkness of night."

"You surely are on the wrong trail this time, Holy Miguel," and Professor Kendal laughed. "I, at least, am one American who is not gold mad; and I have not come here for treasures of the kind

you are thinking of. There is no such treasure here that I know of. I——”

“You lie,” and with swift, angry impatience, Holy Miguel seized hold of the collar of Professor Kendal’s shirt, ripped open the bosom with a strong downward pull, thrust his hand in the opening and pulled out the velvet-lined leather bag that Professor Kendal had had made in order to carry the precious cartouch of gold in the safest possible place, suspended over his bosom by a leather thong encircling his neck. With a violent jerk Holy Miguel broke the thong which supported the bag, opened it and, with a look of angry triumph, took out the two halves of the cartouch and held them up in front of Professor Kendal’s face.

“You lie,” again he exclaimed with angry vehemence. “Here it tells where the treasure is hid. Have I not seen you many time looking at it, with the greed of gold in your eyes. Now show; or——” and, with a wolfish smile, he turned and pointed to the horrible pile in the center of the great room.

Professor Kendal’s face had grown hard and stern and the scar over his left eye had flamed red and his great frame had straightened and stiffened; but he made no move to resist the acts of Holy Miguel. He knew how worse than useless it would be.

“Man,” he cried sternly, “it is for you to look there,” and he nodded toward the pile of dead, “and learn what the vengeance of President Diaz

is like; for as surely as the sun rises and sets, he will hunt you down and hang you, if harm comes to us. About the treasure I have spoken truth. There is no treasure that I——”

“You lie,” again violently interrupted Holy Miguel. “There is treasure and you will find it; or you and all with you will die. As for the great President Diaz, we have a fine story to tell him of how you all died at the hands of the Pullers of Scalps, a few that his soldiers did not kill, of the great fight you made, very, very brave deaths will we give you, and of how we escaped because we were not with you when the attack was made. Si, we will bring his soldiers here and show them your dead bodies, where the Pullers of Scalps threw them on top of their dead. And we will tell him how we, coming suddenly upon the few Pullers of Scalps that were left, slew them all and added their bodies to the great pile and then fled the unholy place. The story sounds so like the truth, Señor Professor, that your good friend, President Diaz, will believe it; and no harm shall come to us,” and again that wolfish grin showed his white teeth. “Now, will you show treasure and live? or not show and die? I have no more time to waste on you.”

“Again I tell you that we are not after treasures of gold or jewels; but, if we were, I would not show you where they were hidden to save my body from rotting on yonder awful pile.”

“Si, brave Señor Professor, not to save your

body; but what of the sweet señorita and the others? But I am in big haste. Will you show the treasure? Or must I kill?"

"Man, you are mad. Release us at once; or you shall hang as surely as President Diaz rules. I——"

"You waste precious time," again interrupted Holy Miguel angrily. "I talk no more with you. See, when the shadow of the sun reaches that big crack in the floor, ten, perhaps fifteen minutes, then I ask again. You answer, no; you die. You answer, yes; you live," and Holy Miguel pointed to a crack on the floor at their feet, toward which a sun-shadow, already within a foot of the crack, was slowly moving. "Now, I talk no more," and he abruptly turned his back on Professor Kendal, walked a couple of paces away and stood with his eyes fixed on the slowly moving shadow.

For the first time a full realization of their terrible situation now came to Professor Kendal. Up to the present moment he had not really believed that Holy Miguel would dare to murder them. He had thought that the fear of President Diaz would keep him from going that far. But, evidently, Holy Miguel did not fear even President Diaz; or else he had sufficient confidence in the story he and his men had concocted to tell the President, that he did not think they had any occasion to fear him. At any rate the look now on his face and in his eyes plainly told Professor Kendal that Holy Miguel had meant every word he had said, and

that if he did not instantly tell him where the supposed treasure was hidden, he and all with him would be killed and their bodies thrown on that horrid pile.

And he knew of no hidden treasure to reveal!

And each moment the shadow crept nearer to the crack in the floor!

Professor Kendal's thoughts turned to the others. He was responsible for their being there in that dreadful situation. And Loretta—— He shuddered and turned desperately to Holy Miguel.

"Come, name your price," he cried. "I will pay it, will guarantee that no harm shall come to you or to your men. Name your price, man, and be quick about it."

Holy Miguel did not answer, did not lift, his eyes from where the shadow was slowly creeping nearer to the crack in the floor, did not move or give evidence of having heard a word, did not in any way pay the slightest attention to Professor Kendal's continued offers and threats and declarations that there was no treasure.

"Oh, corral the talk. Let the phoby cat do his dam'dest. I'd rather be dead anyhow than live longer in his company," and Cowboy Jim turned and deliberately spat at Holy Miguel.

Still Holy Miguel did not move; and still his eyes remained fixed on the shadow that now had almost reached the crack.

Dick and Harry stood close by the side of Professor Kendal. It seemed terrible to them to die

thus, without a blow struck in self-defense. Suddenly Dick's face lit up and he turned quickly to Professor Kendal.

"Can't we overpower Holy Miguel and the two men with him, even if our hands are bound," he whispered excitedly. "There are only three of them and——"

"No, look," and Professor Kendal nodded grimly toward Holy Miguel, who had suddenly lifted his eyes from the shadow and now stood looking at Dick, the wolf-grin on his face, and one hand on the butt of the big revolver in his belt.

"The shadow, see, it has reached the crack," and he drew the revolver and pointed with it to the crack in the floor. "Now, your answer," and he turned peremptorily to Professor Kendal; "and speak short and plain; for it is not good for us to stay long in this devil-dwelling city. The treasure, will you tell where it is hidden?"

"There is no trea——"

A violent slap over the mouth from Holy Miguel's free hand cut short the word.

"Then you die and all with you die," and Holy Miguel's eyes flamed with baffled rage and greed. "Anyhow would you all have died; for no Mexican would trust the word of a gringo," and the wolf-grin came back on his face. "Yet it is not so bad for us; for we have all that you brought with you," and, suddenly lifting the revolver above his head, he pulled the trigger.

At the sound of the shot, all the men who had

been left in the anteroom, came rushing excitedly into the great chamber, their weapons ready in their hands; and swiftly surrounded the Americans.

Holy Miguel lifted his hand and opened his mouth to speak; but no words came; for at that instant a weird, deep-throated, booming yell came from somewhere outside of the great building; and, a moment later, was followed by another yell coming from a greater distance.

All stood as if frozen in their tracks and listened. A minute, two minutes, three minutes passed in death-like silence. Then Holy Miguel, with a horrible oath, followed by the names of half a dozen saints, gave a number of rapid orders in Mexican; and our friends, a few minutes later, found themselves lined up in front of one of the side walls of the room, their backs to the wall and their faces to the Mexicans, who stood some ten paces in front of them, rifles held ready to shoot.

Holy Miguel now stepped in front of Professor Kendal, the wolfish grin again curling his lips away from his teeth.

"The devils of this unholy place are calling for blood," he said. "I will give them your blood and they will come and suck it in while it is yet warm. One minute I now give you to pray to the good God. Then we shoot and throw your bodies on that rotting pile and flee this unholy place. Sorry for the so great speed. I had planned a slower, a more fitting death for the great Señor Professor,

the good friend of President Diaz, and his friends. Now pray; for in one minute you die," and he drew out of its pocket a large silver watch and, holding it on the palm of his hand, bent his eyes closely on its face.

All the Mexicans now stood facing the Americans, ready to shoot at the word of Holy Miguel, their backs to the ruined wall on the opposite side of the room.

It was a dreadful, an awful moment for the Americans. Death sudden and terrible faced them. In a moment more the rifles would flame; and their bullet-mangled bodies would be given hideous burial on that horrible pile of rotting dead, in this lonely ruined temple of a forgotten civilization. Yet not one of them, not even Loretta, or Bill Burke, or Chin Chink, showed a sign of craven fear. All, at the fatal words of Holy Miguel, lifted their eyes heavenward and their lips began to move; and then a startled horrified look came on each face and their eyes remained frozen on the opposite wall back of the Mexicans.

"Thirty seconds," and Holy Miguel lifted his eyes from the watch for a moment, to see how these gringos were facing death, and smiled at the look of staring horror he saw on each face. "Thirty seconds more to live," he grinned, "and then your bodies, even that of the sweet señorita, will rot on that stinking pile. I myself will shoot you," and his snakelike eyes turned to the face of

Professor Kendal, "with your own gun, right between those two fear-staring eyes."

"If you can," and the great frame of Professor Kendal suddenly straightened and a look of triumph came on his face. "Look behind you."

But Holy Miguel only grinned and glanced down at his watch.

"The minute is up," he cried, and, lifting his rifle to his shoulder, turned to his men. "Ready—aim—fi——"

But, before the fatal word could be spoken, great hairy hands, with clawlike nails, closed swiftly around each Mexican neck, the heads were jerked violently backward and monstrous hairy mouths, with long fang-like teeth, seized each quivering throat.

The Mexicans were in the death-grip of the ape-men!

For a moment the bodies swayed horribly in that awful struggle; and then the Mexicans were dropped limp and lifeless to the floor; and the great ape-men straightened up and, throwing back their heads, uttered a roar of triumph so dreadful and terrifying that the very air itself seemed to tremble with the horror of the sound. At the same time they beat upon their enormous hairy chests with their great hammer-like fists.

There was a terrible dozen of these huge ape-men in the van of the attack and back of them, still climbing over the ruined wall and darting out of its niches and recesses, were at least fifty more,

all of the same breed as that dreadful creature slain by Dick's rifle bullet on the first night after leaving the safety of the Acapulco Trail. And so silently and cautiously had that terrible twelve crept up behind the Mexicans, that the first they knew of their presence was when the great hairy hands closed around their throats.

All had happened so suddenly and so unexpectedly that our friends had stood paralyzed with horror throughout this dreadful scene. They now saw themselves freed from the deadly peril of the Mexicans rifles, only to find themselves, still bound and helpless, facing a yet more hideous and terrible danger—the ape-men; for it was not to be supposed that the horrible creatures would spare them. Each moment they expected to see the great beasts leap toward them and to feel that horrible backward thrust of the head and the long teeth at the throat.

For a couple of minutes the monsters stood pounding their chests and sounding their terrifying roars of victory. Then they became silent and fixed their eyes on the faces of the Americans. For one dreadful moment they thus stood and looked; and then they sprang. In two great leaps they crossed the intervening space and their great hairy hands were about to close around the throats of their victims, who stood helpless and hopeless, praying that the end would come quickly, when, with startling suddenness, a clear, powerful, trumpet-like call pealed forth, until it seemed to

fill the great room with the tremendous volume of its sound.

The great hairy hands dropped before a hand touched a throat; and the monstrous beast-men whirled about and faced the great altar, awe and fear in their half-human faces. The Americans, too, turned their startled eyes to the altar and there they saw an astounding sight.

Directly in front of the altar stood a tall and beautifully proportioned man, dressed in a long and gracefully flowing robe of white and holding to his lips the trumpet, from which had come that weird and beautiful burst of sound. In dress and bearing, in all save size, he was like one of the statues that stood, trumpets to lips, at each side of the altar.

"The Toltec!" There was wonder and awe in Professor Kendal's voice and he stood like one entranced, his eyes fixed on the glorious figure before the altar.

Again the wonderful trumpet sounded; and this time there was a stern note of command in its powerful tones.

For a moment longer the ape-men stood staring at the miracle before the altar; and then, without a glance in the direction of the Americans and with their eyes still fixed on the man with the trumpet, they began to back slowly from the room, as the tones of the trumpet became sharper and more commanding.



ITH

NOT until the last ape-man had disappeared over the ruined wall or vanished into one of its dark recesses, did the man before the altar lower the trumpet from his lips, revealing a singularly beautiful and noble countenance. He now laid the trumpet on the altar, turned and, walking slowly, with a look of deepest reverence and awe on his face, came straight to where Professor Kendal stood and fell on his knees before him and bowed his head over his feet. The one word, "Quetzalcoatl," came reverently from his lips, as he fell on his knees. For a full minute he remained thus in deepest reverence. Then he rose slowly to his feet, with an unconscious dignity and easy gracefulness that seemed to be as natural to him as breathing; and, lifting his eyes to the face of Professor Kendal slowly spoke a few pleasant-sounding words in a smooth-flowing but unknown language; and paused, as if for a reply.

Professor Kendal still stood like one in a trance. He was seeing the greatest dream of his life coming true, a dream so marvelous that even now he hardly dared believe the evidence of his own eyes. But, at the pause of the stranger, he awoke ab-

ruptly from his trance and turned quickly, so that the man could see that his hands were bound behind his back.

With an exclamation of horror, the Toltec, if, indeed, he were such, sprang behind him and, with one swift sure stroke with some small and very sharp instrument, freed his hands from their long imprisonment.

"Thank you," and Professor Kendal began rubbing his aching and benumbed wrists. "Now," and he bowed to the Toltec, "if you will excuse me, I will perform a like service for the others," and, going to the dead body of Holy Miguel, he drew his knife from its sheath and hurried forward to release the others.

But the stranger, divining his purpose, sprang lightly in front of him.

"No, no," he cried in plain English. "I will free your friends," and he leaped to the side of Dick, who was the nearest, and, in a trice, had cut the cruel thongs that held him prisoner.

Professor Kendal stopped short, utterly dumbfounded to hear this strange being address him in English. How came he to speak English? Could it be possible that he was an American or an Englishman? If so, how came he there under such strange circumstances? He looked sharply at the man; and dismissed the possibility of his belonging to any race of human beings of whom he had knowledge. His features and the shape of his head were as different from any known race, as

was the head and face of a Caucasian from that of a Mongoloid; and yet there was something reminiscent of the Mongoloid about him. Indeed, imagine a Mongoloid type, refined and spiritualized until it had lost all its brutality and coarseness and had become in reality a new type, with just a suggestion of its origin remaining, and you will have a pretty good idea of the racial characteristics of the man who had so startled Professor Kendal by unexpectedly speaking to him in English.*

The Toltec passed quickly and silently from Dick to Harry and to the other bound Americans, swiftly releasing each as he did so; but, when he came to Bill Burke and Chin Chink, he paused and stood looking at them in astonishment. Evidently he had never before seen a negro or a Chinaman.

Bill Burke became greatly excited; and the wrinkles on his face began to work, as if they were a month behind time and had only five minutes in which to catch up. And no wonder; for the negro believed that this glorious being, dressed in a long flowing white robe, who had so suddenly and mysteriously appeared, just in time to save their lives, was an honest-to-goodness angel; and Bill Burke had never before seen a real live angel. Awe and fear and dread and several other emotions, all were struggling to express themselves on his face at the same time.

What would the angel do with him?

*Many historians and archeologists have long believed that the ancient peoples of Mexico were of Mongoloid origin.—AUTHOR.

Why did he not free him at once, as he had the others?

Why did he stand there looking so queerly at him?

Bill Burke's knees began to shake; and, in a moment more, his fears got the better of his awe; and, falling on his knees, he lifted his face imploring to the Toltec.

"O Massah Angel! O God A'mighty! What am yo' gwine fo' to do wid dis po' niggah? I knows I's not good enough fo' yo' to wipe de mud off yo' foots on; but, Massah Angel, I's all dat I's got, an' it am gwine to be spectifically bad fo' dis niggah, if anything done happens to me," and he caught hold of the hem of the white robe and pressed it to his lips.

The Toltec smiled and, bending forward over the kneeling negro, swiftly cut the thongs that bound his hands behind his back; and, still smiling, turned to Chin Chink.

The imperturbable Chinaman calmly turned his back to him and held out his bound hands.

"Me velly glad," he said, "you come plenty quick lan' makee big monkee run, alla samee like cop. Me thankee you velly muchee," and began rubbing his freed wrists and hands.

The Toltec had performed this service for the grateful, but somewhat awed Americans, swiftly and without uttering a word, even in reply to their expressions of astonishment and thanks; and, the moment he had freed Chin Chink's hands, he again

turned to Professor Kendal, a shade of anxiety showing on his face.

"As my Lord Quetzalcoatl knows, there is need of great haste," he said deferentially; "or, perchance, even he will be too late to save our beloved Exitl. Shall I lead the way?" and he partly turned toward the altar.

"A moment, please," and Professor Kendal's face flushed with excitement. "How comes it that you speak the English language so perfectly?"

"Because," and a smile illuminated the Toltec's face, "I had a perfect teacher, an American, who dropped from the clouds in a marvelous ball that floats, called the balloon. That was many years ago; and now he is dead. More will I tell you when we have leisure; but now we must haste, for the need is very great. Come, I will show you the way," and again he turned toward the beautiful altar.

"My friends must go with me," declared Professor Kendal.

"If my Lord Quetzalcoatl so wills," and the Toltec bowed. "But they will need be stout of heart and strong in courage to go the way we go."

"And we have many things to take with us," continued Professor Kendal, "horses, burros and equipment. They are just outside the door. It will take but little time to have everything in readiness."

"No, no." The Toltec spoke respectfully but firmly. "Empty-handed as you are must you come.

Horse or burro could not travel the road we go; and all weapons are forbidden in Tollan."

"What, not even take our guns and ropes?" cried Cowboy Jim, who, with the others had crowded up close to Professor Kendal, astonishment and protest showing on his face.

"For five hundred years," and the Toltec looked straight into the eyes of Cowboy Jim, "there has not been a weapon in Tollan. No, you will not take your guns. Now," and again he turned his eyes anxiously to the face of Professor Kendal, "if my Lord Quetzalcoatl so wills, we will go quickly; for Exitl has long been awaiting us."

Professor Kendal hesitated. It was asking much of him and his friends to go on this mysterious and it well might be dangerous journey weaponless. He turned to the others and saw doubt and consternation pictured on each face.

"You are asking much, in asking us to go with you unarmed," he said, again turning to the Toltec. "We know not who you are, nor even where Tollan is, nor what dangers might threaten us. We do not wish to go weaponless."

"I am Ith, the son of the high priest, Oth, the most venerated man in Tollan," and the Toltec bowed and smiled. "Tollan is not far, a few hours' journey; but there is only one way thither, and that way is very difficult and known only to Oth, my father, and to myself. But surely Lord Quetzalcoatl knows all this and wishes but to test Ith, his priest," and his eyes rested in serene and

worshipful confidence on the face of Professor Kendal.

"That is where you are wrong and the sooner I set you right the better," and Professor Kendal smiled. "I never saw nor heard of you before, nor am I your Lord Quetzalcoatl, but plain Professor Thane Kendal, who is deeply interested in the remains of the ancient peoples of Mexico, the races who have left such remarkable monuments of their greatness and civilization as we see here," and his eyes swiftly swept his surroundings. "We have been brought here by a wonderful find, made by myself and those two boys there," and he indicated Dick and Harry. "Wait, I will show you—— Great Moses!" and Professor Kendal gave a violent start. "That villain still has the cartouch!" and he sprang to where the body of Holy Miguel lay and began searching it with feverish haste. In a moment he rose to his feet, with the bag containing the broken halves of the cartouch of gold in his hand.

"Here it is," and, thrusting a hand into the bag, he brought out the halves of the cartouch. "See, this is what brought us here," and he extended the halves of the cartouch to Ith.

The Toltec's face had grown white with disappointment at the denial of Professor Kendal and he had taken a quick backward step and had thrust a hand to his eyes, as if he would shut out some dreadful vision that had arisen before them; but, the moment he saw the halves of the cartouch of gold,

he was transfigured. With a cry of joy, he sprang forward, caught the halves of the cartouch up in his hands and examined them with face illuminated and eyes that shone.

"It is the Cartouch of Quetzalcoatl!" he exclaimed, awe and gladness trembling in his voice. "The two halves of it complete, the half my brother Eth lost here in this city, together with his life, and the half from the Great Cave of Chitaxtl, marvelously reunited. Now is the prophecy of old fulfilled and the days of our long waiting are over. Now has the last sun set on Tollan and the Toltec race is no more," and, pressing the cartouch close to his bosom, he lifted his eyes skyward and a great sadness and solemnity came on his face and his lips moved, but no words came from their moving.

All stood silent and awed. They were witnessing the obsequies of a once great and glorious nation, the ending of a mighty people. Before them stood one of the last of a great and powerful race.

For a couple of long minutes Ith stood thus, eyes lifted skyward, lips moving and the sorrows of a dying nation on his face, then he slowly lowered his eyes.

"It is finished and it is well," he said in a voice of infinite sadness. "Now am I ready to be gathered to my fathers and to dwell with Quetzalcoatl forever. I——"

He gave a violent start, coming back to the realities with a jerk, and turned his glowing eyes to the face of Professor Kendal.

"Man, if you are not Quetzalcoatl himself, then of a surety have you been sent by him, bearing, as proof of the sending, the Cartouch of Quetzalcoatl. There can be no doubt of it. The great god has sent you to save the beloved, the thrice lovely Exitl from the horrors of Boowhang, the accursed. Come, there is need of great haste. And you may bring your weapons that shoot lightning and slay from afar. Tollan ended with the coming of the Cartouch of Quetzalcoatl; and the laws of Tollan are no more. Make haste and get your weapons; for the moments are precious with the blood of Exitl. But do not overburden yourselves, for the way is hard for a strong man, though unburdened."

Professor Kendal, his face glowing with excitement, at once turned to the little group of wondering and astonished men.

"You will go with Ith and me on this great adventure of course?" he asked.

"I will," replied Captain Kent, his own face alight with enthusiasm.

"To the last hair on the cow's tail," declared Cowboy Jim emphatically.

"Yes," almost yelled Dick and Harry; and Loretta and her father smiled and nodded their approval of the sentiments expressed.

"Then get your weapons from the dead Mexicans and a hundred rounds of ammunition each. Unpack the horses and burros and turn them loose. They will not wander far. Make haste,"

and Professor Kendal set the example by quickly gathering his weapons from the dead body of Holy Miguel and then hurrying out with the others into the anteroom, where the animals and their packs had been left by the Mexicans, to secure the hundred rounds of ammunition and to aid in attending to the animals.

Ith stood in the doorway between the two rooms and watched their doings with somber but interested eyes.

All worked swiftly and, in a very short time, Professor Kendal stood before Ith and reported: "All ready. You lead and we will follow."

The Toltec, with a swift appraising glance over the little company of Americans, turned and, without a word, led the way back into the great room and up to where stood the beautiful snow-white altar of marble. At the foot of the altar he paused and turned to Professor Kendal and those with him.

"Put courage into your hearts and steadiness into your eyes and limbs," he warned; "for soon you will have need of both. Now," and his fine face saddened, "has the glory of Tollan departed forever; and there is no longer need of guarding the Great Secret that, for centuries, the high priests of Tollan have preserved inviolate. Only six days ago did my father, Oth, the high priest, who is very old, reveal it to me, that I might come hither to await the expected coming of Quetzalcoatl. Now I make known the Great Secret to you,

strangers who come from another and unknown race, sure that you come by the will of Quetzalcoatl, since you come bearing the Cartouch of Quetzalcoatl, if, indeed, you be not Quetzalcoatl his very self," and he fixed his eyes on the face of Professor Kendal. "For, is it not written, even on the cartouch itself: 'As a sign that you may know I am Quetzalcoatl, your god, though in the form of a man, will I bring the other half of the Cartouch of Gold; and the fitting together of the halves shall be to you the proof of my godship.' But, let that be as Quetzalcoatl wills. I obey him who comes bearing the Cartouch of Quetzalcoatl," and he bowed his head before Professor Kendal.

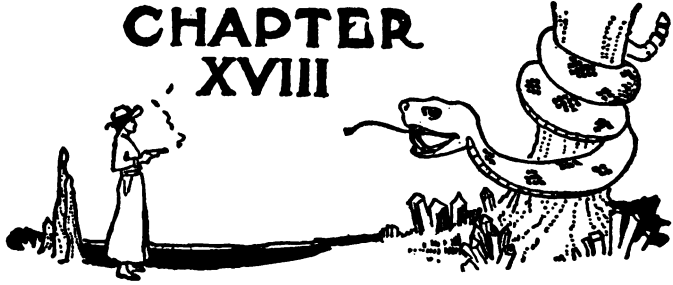
"Come," and he straightened up. "Now will we go to Tollan, now will we pass under the ring of mountains that for centuries has guarded Tollan from the rest of the world," and, turning to the great altar of marble that rose a full five feet above his head, he pressed strongly with his two hands against a certain part of its carved side; and a great block of marble swung slowly inward, leaving an opening some six feet high by three feet wide.

"Follow close behind me, he, who calls himself Professor Thane Kendal, coming first," and Ith stepped within the opening and disappeared into the darkness within. A moment later he reappeared, standing just within the opening and a little to one side, and stood there awaiting the entering of the others.

All cast a swift glance around, it might be their last look upon this goodly world, glorious in the bright sunlight. Then Professor Kendal, his face that of a dreamer who is seeing his most wondrous dream coming true, stepped within the altar. All the others, without an instant's hesitation, followed.

The moment all stood crowded together within the semi-darkness of the altar, the Toltec touched a hidden lever, the great door of marble swung slowly shut; and they stood in absolute darkness, not knowing what dread terrors might be awaiting them; but ready to face whatever came bravely, as true Americans ever should be ready to do.

CHAPTER XVIII



IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH

FOR a moment after the closing clang of the great stone door had ceased to reverberate through the black darkness of that narrow chamber, all stood silent and motionless, awed and wondering what would happen next. Then came the gentle voice of the Toltec, sounding cool and soft as flowing waters.

"Fear not. No danger threatens here," it said. "In a moment there will be light," and, even as he uttered the last word, a wondrous radiance, soft and pleasing to the eyes, yet bright and clear as daylight, flooded the room.

Ith stood at the head of a flight of narrow stone steps that disappeared downward into the blackness, holding in his hand a small and quaintly shaped lamp, with a ball-like globe no larger than a marble. All the light came from this small globe; and yet the eyes could look at it steadily and without flinching.

"Four hundred and seventeen years ago," and a note of pride came into Ith's voice, "my priestly

ancestors had this passageway cut through the living rocks down into the bowels of the earth, through the Snake Caverns of Ooze and the Great Jaws of Death and under the Mountains of Nor and up into the Great Pyramid of Quetzalcoatl in the mountain-rimmed land of Tollan. And from that day to this has the Great Secret of this way to the world outside the ring of mountains been known only to the high priests of Tollan and by them it has been kept inviolate. But now Tollan has fallen, her glories are no more, her laws are dead and I, the last of her priests, at the command of the god of the Toltecs, reveal the way to the bearer of the Cartouch of Quetzalcoatl, that the words of the most holy prophets of old may be fulfilled to the end."

He paused and stood with eyes uplifted for a moment, as if in silent prayer. Then again his eyes turned to Professor Kendal and the others.

"This road," he continued, "passes through great dangers and only the brave-hearted and the steady of limb and eye can journey over it. Now, if there be any here whose courage begins to falter, I will swing open the great stone door and he can step out in the world of sunlight." Again he paused and his eyes swept swiftly over their faces.

"Lead on," commanded Professor Kendal impatiently. "We will follow and there will be no faltering."

Ith, without a word, turned and started down

the stone steps, the strange light clearly illuminating the way.

Professor Kendal followed close behind him, then came Captain Kent, followed by Cowboy Jim, Abel Johnson, Loretta, Dick, Harry and, lastly, by Bill Burke and Chin Chink, in the order named, the way not being wide enough for two to walk abreast.

Steeply downward for a hundred steps they passed; and then the stairs came to an end and they saw, stretching before them as far as they could see, a long hall-like passageway, some seven feet high and just wide enough for two of them to walk comfortably abreast. The walls of this passageway were smooth and plain; and the strokes of the chisels used in cutting them out of the living rock could still be seen on their sides. The floor sloped gradually downward. At first the walls and the floor were dry; but soon they became damp and, at the end of half an hour, the water was dripping in big drops from the top and the sides and the floor was wet and the air damp and chilly; and yet it was fresh and sweet, notwithstanding its chill and dampness. In some way, they could not understand how, this deep passageway was well ventilated.

"I feel as if I were about a hundred miles below the surface of the earth and still going down," Harry said, as the passageway made an abrupt turn and then descended downward so steeply that footholds had been cut in the rock of the floor.

"I'll bet that we really are at least two miles below the surface of the earth," Dick declared. "I am sure we must have been walking steadily downward now for two hours. But, what a tremendous engineering feat the cutting of this passageway through the living rock is. I am not sure that there are any engineers living now that could duplicate it. I——"

"Massah Dick," hoarsely interrupted Bill Burke, who was directly behind Dick, in a stage whisper, leaning forward until his mouth was almost by the side of Dick's ear. "Massah Dick," and his voice began to tremble, "seems like I done smell somethin' po'ful like brimstone; an' I done heah a distant groanin', like dat ob lost souls in de torments. Now," and a great awe and dread came into his lowered voice, "yo' don't reckon dat dat mystiferous gemmen I done took fo' to be an angel out ob hebbin, am de old debble himself? An' dat he am a-takin' us to—— Listen! Dar am dat groanin' sound again," and Bill Burke straightened up and stood listening, while the wrinkles on his face froze into a look of horror and dreadful apprehension.

Indeed, all stopped and listened, even Ith; for now from afar down the narrow opening through the rock came a low dreadful sound, like the dying groans of some hideous monster, and a faint yet plainly perceptible smell of brimstone.

For a moment even the stout hearts of Dick and Harry faltered and their eyes turned in dread and

apprehension to the tall form of Ith, standing a few feet below them and holding the strange lamp high above his head. Could it be possible that he was leading them to some hideously terrible death? No. A look into his calm benign face reassured them. Surely such a countenance could not be associated with evil.

For a minute all stood listening, wondering what that weird far-off groaning portended, then Ith smiled and spoke.

"The Great Jaws of Death are opening," he said. "We must hurry; for, within the hour, they will close, not to open again for twenty-four hours. But first must we pass through the Snake Caverns of Ooze, yet fear not. A courageous soul and steady eyes and limbs can laugh at the threatening dangers. Now follow me closely," and he continued on his way down the steep descent, still holding the lamp high above his head.

The others followed at once, ready to face the unknown perils with brave hearts. But Bill Burke kept as close as possible behind Dick and Harry and his eyes rolled wildly and he was continually mumbling prayers and groaning negro fashion. Evidently Bill Burke was a very badly frightened negro. Chin Chink wore the same imperturbable face; but he, too, kept close to Dick and Harry.

For, perhaps, three minutes longer the dreadful groaning sound continued, rising and falling in volume, then the awful sound abruptly ceased. At the same moment the passageway again made

a sharp turn and, not ten rods ahead, they saw that it opened into a great cave, filled with a weirdly bluish hazy light; and a vast low rumbling swishing sound, not unlike the very distant beating of the ocean surf on rocks, came faintly to their ears and the smell of brimstone grew stronger.

"O, Lo'd, Gawd A'mighty, hab mercy on dis niggah," moaned Bill Burke, pressing yet closer to Dick.

And even our stout-hearted boys felt a chill of dread at their hearts, while Loretta clutched tightly her father's arm and turned her whitening face to him. But Ith, without turning or uttering a word in explanation of the weird phenomenon, walked swiftly on toward the opening into the great cave.

Professor Kendal, blind to all peril, followed swiftly after him; and by his side hurried Captain Kent, a look like that of one walking in his sleep on his face; and after them came the others, a great curiosity driving them on in spite of the dread in their hearts.

Just before reaching the cave the passageway widened, until at the point of entrance all could stand abreast; and here all paused and stood transfixed by the scene before and below them.

They looked into an immense cavern, with huge, oddly twisted and shaped, snow-white, stalatitic columns, stretching from the top of the cave some seventy-five feet above their heads to the floor at least another seventy-five feet below them. There were

hundreds of these enormous columns, all as white as snow and all fantastically yet gracefully curved and twisted, while many white ghost-like forms hung pendant from the roof and rose specter-like from the floor, stalactites and stalagmites in the making. And over all fell the weird blue light, while the low rumblings sounded louder and nearer and the smell of brimstone grew yet stronger.

For a short time all stood spellbound by the awesome beauty of the scene. Then, almost simultaneously, a gasp of horror came from each, as their eyes, becoming accustomed to the strange blue light, searched the shadows that hung over the floor of the vast cavern, or, rather, series of connected caverns and saw, writhing on the floor and twisting their slimy folds around the white columns, thousands of snakes, some of them hideous monsters a hundred feet long. All had abnormally large, saucer-like eyes, shining black skins and the fangs in the jaws of the monsters looked a foot long.

Directly in front of where they stood and not more than fifteen feet away, rose one of the grotesquely shaped and twisted columns. Suddenly, from behind this column, darted the huge head of one of the snake monsters, jaws distended, great fangs gleaming whitely and huge, spear-pointed tongue darting swiftly in and out of the ugly red throat. For a moment the great head swayed back and forth, as the hideous saucer-like eyes searched for a victim and the huge coils unloosened them-



THEY LOOKED INTO AN IMMENSE CAVERN



ATOMIC LENOX
FOUNDATION

selves from the column to be ready to strike. Then, with a horrible sickening hiss, the wide-opened jaws darted swiftly toward Loretta.

So dreadful and unexpected had been the sudden appearance of the huge head from behind the column, that all had stood as if chained to the spot, until, with that horrible hiss, the great jaws darted toward Loretta. Then all sprang into action with such startling suddenness that the reports of their revolvers sounded as one; and the great head, when within a foot of the face of Loretta, suddenly collapsed and sank downward and hung dangling against the white of the column.

Loretta, brave girl! had also fired, her revolver barrel almost in the mouth of the monster; and now, when she saw that the reptile was dead, she whirled about and, with a little cry, threw herself into her father's waiting arms.

Ith, at the moment of the attack, stood the farthest from Loretta; and, unarmed as he was, he had sprang, with the quickness of a cat, to throw his body between her and the threatening jaws. But, before he had covered half the distance, the revolver bullets had done their deadly work; and he had staggered back, almost deafened by the report that went reverberating and echoing through the cavern. Doubtless never before had those caves echoed to such a thunderous sound; and, for fully a minute, the reports echoed back and forth until it seemed the roar of cannons in battle. At the same time a horrible hissing came

from the snakes below, as the slimy monsters reared their heads and waved them to and fro, until the floor of the cavern seemed covered with great moving saucer-like eyes.

As soon as the sound of the shots had ceased, Ith, who was the first to recover from the shock of the dreadful peril that had so suddenly confronted them, stepped quickly to the side of Loretta, who was still sobbing in her father's arms, and laid a hand softly on her shoulder.

"Exitl, the beautiful, when she hears of your bravery and swift action in the presence of the most dreadful and deadly peril, will open wide her heart for you to enter. I saw you thrust the barrel of your weapon almost between the jaws of the monster and fire; and your hand did not tremble, neither did your eyes flinch until the danger was past. Keep this jewel in remembrance of a dreadful danger bravely faced and conquered; and of me," he added sadly. "It is a heart-jewel, rare and precious, and found only in the Great Caves of Nor," and loosening a gold chain, to which was attached a heart-shaped jewel, from around his neck, Ith very gently fastened it around Loretta's neck.

"Always wear it over your heart," he said; "for this jewel has been blessed of the gods and will keep pure the heart of the maiden beating beneath it," and he smiled down into the tear-stained and wondering face uplifted to him. "Look at the jewel, child, and forget the horrors of the saucer-

eyed monster," and he placed the jewel on the palm of Loretta's hand.

Loretta lowered her eyes from the face of Ith and looked at the jewel glowing on her hand. Never before had she seen or heard of a like jewel. Half the size of an egg and shaped and rounded like a human heart, it lay there glowing and sparkling on the palm of her hand, as if it held imprisoned in its center a flaming drop of blood. Even in that weird bluish light it blazed red, a deeper and more brilliant red than ever dwelt in the heart of a ruby. Indeed, it did not seem to shine by reflected light at all, but to scintillate living rays of red from its own glowing heart of fire.

"Oh, how beautiful! How wonderful!" Loretta exclaimed, everything forgotten for the moment but the jewel sparkling on her hand. "But it is too wonderful a gift for little me," and she made a movement as if to return the jewel to Ith.

"No. Keep it; for, like your heart, it shines with its own purity."

"Now," and Ith turned quickly to Professor Kendal, "Exitl calls and we must hasten. Look not down and follow me without fear, though I appear to be walking on air. From this point a narrow bridge hangs suspended from the ceiling of the cavern, far above the horrors below, and passes over the river of burning brimstone, even to the Cavern of the Great Jaws of Death. But you cannot see the bridge, because it is made of the

tightly woven strands of Oxtl, a transparent metal that is many times stronger than the best steel and known only in Tollan. The bridge is entirely enclosed by these invisible strands, so fear not; for neither the great white bats, nor the saucer-eyed snakes can harm you, nor can you fall. But look not down, lest the seeming danger make sick the courage in your heart. Here is where we enter, between these two pillars of rock, to which the strands of the bridge are fastened," and Ith stepped between the two huge pillars of rock that stood some four feet apart and a little to their right, which, evidently, had been chiseled out of the living rock purposely to support the bridge.

"I will go first. Let him who calls himself Professor Thane Kendal come after me and the others follow after him in single file, for the bridge is not wide enough for two to walk comfortably abreast. Be not afraid. The bridge would support many times our weight," and, without hesitation, he stepped out between the two pillars and stood seemingly on the air some six feet from the edge of the visible rock and far above the dreadful depths below. "Come," he said, "time presses."



THE NAKE CAVERNS OF OOZE

PROFESSOR KENDAL at once followed Ith and stepped between the pillars of rock and out on the invisible bridge and over the hissing snakes below.

"I will go last," said Captain Kent, with a glance toward Bill Burke, who stood with mouth agape and bulging eyes, staring at Ith and Professor Kendal standing there apparently on air, stepped to one side to allow the others to pass.

"This shore is some curious and more than I bargained for; but I'm game," and Cowboy Jim stepped between the pillars and out on the bridge. "Great long-horns of Texas!" he exclaimed the moment he saw himself off the rock and apparently standing on nothing. "This walking on air is some sensation! Come on, fellows, the going is fine," and he started, a little gingerly it must be confessed, along after Ith and Professor Kendal, who were now walking swiftly on over the bridge.

"Come on 'Retta. It's our turn next," and Abel Johnson, with Loretta clinging tightly to his hand,

promptly followed after Cowboy Jim. "Look up, little gal," he warned, as he stepped on the bridge, "and follow close behind your old dad."

Loretta bravely and without hesitation, her eyes lifted confidently to her father's face and her hand still clinging tightly to his hand, walked off the rock and on the bridge.

Dick glanced at Harry and Harry glanced at Dick; and then both started for the bridge, Dick ahead; and, in another moment, they were on the bridge and following close behind Loretta and her father.

"Now Bill Burke," and Captain Kent turned to the negro, "get your trotters in motion," and he pointed to where the others were now walking, one behind the other, through the air apparently on nothing.

This strange sight was too much for the courage of Bill Burke, and, falling on his knees, he began to groan and pray, as only a frightened negro can.

Captain Kent drew his big six-shooter and leveled it at Bill Burke's head.

"I'll give you until I count three to get on that bridge," he said sharply. "One—two—th——"

Bill Burke, with a groan of despair, made a spasmodic jump between the two pillars and, shutting both eyes, staggered off the rock and on the bridge. The moment he felt the bridge beneath his feet, he stopped in utter amazement, opened his eyes and looked down. Far below he saw the bottom of the great cave, hideous with hissing saucer-eyed

snakes, and himself standing there apparently on nothing, high above them. For an instant he stood staring, too amazed to speak, then his amazement found words.

"Gawd A'mighty!" he cried. "It am a real honest-to-goodness bridge! I can feel it under mah foots an' wid mah hands; but I can't see it wid mah eyes. Now am dis niggah completely discomfuddlemuddled. But I's gwine to follah Massah Dick, debbel or no debbel," and he began hurriedly making his way over the bridge after Dick and Harry.

"Now you," and Captain Kent turned to Chin Chink.

"No shootee. Me goee alla samee quick," and Chin Chink hurried on the bridge after the negro.

Captain Kent at once followed the Chinaman.

All were now on that strange invisible bridge, hanging there seventy-five feet or more above the bottom of the cavern. The floor felt smooth and solid beneath their feet and the sides and the top seemed to be woven out of quarter-inch wire, with about an inch mesh. But, look their sharpest, they could not see the slightest signs of the bridge itself. It gave them a strange and eery feeling to be thus apparently walking on nothing high in the air. One look straight down was enough for the boldest hearted; for the sight of the horrors beneath made their heads reel and filled their hearts with a sickening dread of what might happen, if the bridge should fall.

"I feel like a soap bubble floating in the air," Harry declared, with a slightly nervous laugh, after the first few exciting moments on the bridge had passed.

"And I like a balloon with the stomachache," Dick laughed, making a grimace, as the bridge, under their combined weight, began to sway a very little back and forth.

"Well," laughed Loretta, not to be outdone by the boys, "your feelings can't be compared to mine; for I feel like a very badly frightened girl, walking on a thin thread of white silk a mile above a thousand saucer-eyed devils, waiting, with their great mouths wide open, to gobble me up, if I fall."

The bridge now began to ascend gradually, until it was within a few feet of the roof of the cavern, while, at the same time, the blue light became brighter, the smell of brimstone stronger and the dread sound of surf beating against rocks louder; and, a few minutes later, they stood above one of the most awesome sights ever given mortal to see.

A thousand or more feet below them rolled and tumbled and splashed against its rocky sides a river of burning brimstone, that flowed between the rock-walls of a canyon a thousand feet deep, that cut across and through the solid bottom of the cavern. Blue flames rose and fell above its surface and great puffs of thick yellow smoke broke through the seething mass and burst and floated upward to where a swift wind, that rushed a hundred or more feet above the surface, seized and bore

them, tossing tumultuously, along with the current. As they stood there, staring in wondering awe and amazement up and down the flaming stream, there came a tremendous explosion in the midst of it, that sent a mass of liquid fire, a glorious coruscation of all colors, half-way to the top of the walls of the canyon, a beautiful, but awesome sight. The strong wind that rushed along with the stream, bore the hot fumes and the smoke along with it, so that the air was not overdisagreeable to breathe where they stood.

"That burning stream of sulphur flows for miles under these mountains, this we know; but whence it comes and whither it goes, only the great God knows. Now let us hasten on; for we have yet to pass through the Great Jaws of Death and already half of the hour has gone; and life or death stands waiting by the side of Exitl," and Ith again hurried on his way across the bridge.

Shortly after passing over this astounding phenomenon of nature, the roof of the cavern began to lower and the bridge to descend. Below them, on the bottom of the cavern, the great snakes still crawled and wound their slimy folds around the white columns and reared their saucer-eyed heads and hissed at them. Presently the bridge swung downward, until the larger of the snakes could almost reach it with their darting heads, and entered through a great opening into a smaller cave. At the point of entrance into this cave, Ith paused.

"This is the Cavern of the Great White Bats,"

he said. "But fear not and do not shoot. The great bats cannot harm you, neither can the snakes. The bridge will protect you against their utmost efforts. Now hasten, for we near the Cave of the Great Jaws of Death," and Ith hurried on along that marvelous bridge and into the Cave of the Great White Bats.

"Great Moses! I wonder what sort of a cave we will enter next," Dick exclaimed.

"The Cavern of the Pink Elephants, I presume," Harry grinned. "Nothing now would surprise me. I—— Great guns, what is that?" and Harry jumped violently, as a great white something thudded against the side of the bridge not two feet from his head and clung there. "Glory be, it is a great white vampire bat, with a body as big as that of a fox!" and he stood staring at the vicious-looking thing that clung with his hooks to the meshes of the bridge.

At the same moment a succession of thuds came from all parts of the bridge around them; and a score or more of the great bats clung to its sides and top and glared hungrily at them out of large pink eyes and gnashed teeth as large and strong as those of a dog and uttered harsh shrill squeaks.

Loretta screamed and clung to her father; and even Professor Kendal uttered an exclamation of horror, while Cowboy Jim's hand went swiftly to the butt of his six-shooter.

"Don't shoot. They cannot touch you. Hurry,"

came sharply from Ith, as he increased his pace almost to a run.

The others needed no urging to get out of sight and sound of these horrible little beasts and pressed close after him. But the great bats still constantly thudded against the top and the sides of the bridge.

Suddenly a great head shot up from below and two great jaws snapped together almost by the side of Dick's head; and his horrified eyes saw the jaws of one of the great saucer-eyed snakes seize a bat that had thudded against the side of the bridge near his head a moment before. One shrill squeak of agony and the bat disappeared down the snake's throat and the monster turned his saucer-eyes on Dick.

"Do not shoot," again warned the voice of Ith. "Even the snakes cannot break through. But hurry; for the Great Jaws of Death are beginning to close," and he began to run.

Again the others needed no urging to follow him; for now the bridge had descended until it was but a few feet above the floor of the cavern and the monster-snakes were swarming on all sides of them, striking at them with their huge heads, hissing horribly, and hurling great slimy folds of their huge bodies upon the bridge. The bridge trembled and swayed, but the wonderful metal held the great reptiles from touching them. Not a poison-fang pierced it.

"There is no danger; but hurry," again called Ith, as he once more increased his speed.

The great saucer-eyed snakes now almost covered the bridge with their huge slimy bodies and the air became filled with a horrible sickening stench. Through this dreadful way, arched with the slimy bodies of the snakes, they ran; and, as they ran, they were conscious of an ever-increasing grinding groaning roar.

"Hurry, hurry!" shouted Ith.

The bridge swayed and creaked and groaned; but still it held; and then, suddenly, they found themselves free from the bridge and running into the mouth of a dark tunnel, with the weird blue light and the horrible snakes and the great white bats behind them.

Now their only light came from the wonderful lamp held in Ith's hand; but it was sufficient and showed that this tunnel had been chiseled by the hands of man through a wall of living rock. For a couple of minutes they continued to run, without slackening their speed, and then, abruptly, the tunnel opened on the floor of another cave.



THE GREAT JAWS OF DEATH

THE cave wherein they now found themselves was not large and that wonderful light Ith carried illuminated its farthest corner.

Just inside the entrance of the cave Ith paused.

"This is the Cave of the Great Jaws of Death," he said. "See," and he pointed to the floor, "the great jaws are closing; yet still we have time, if we move quickly. But death waits to grind the laggard to powder. Do you see that round hole in the opposite wall near the top? That is the opening to another cave; and, once we are in it, the worst of our dangers are over until we reach Tollan."

For the moment all stood uncomprehending, not understanding the meaning of Ith's words, nor how they were to reach the hole in the opposite wall, since it was at least twenty feet above the floor and not more than ten feet from the smooth top of the cavern. Then suddenly they understood. The floor beneath their feet was being pushed upward by some tremendous power from below, at about the rate of four feet a minute. Already the opening through which they had entered the cave

was partly closed. They could see that the sides and the top of the cave were worn smooth and polished by attrition and that the floor was covered with a thick rock-dust, compressed so tightly that it was as smooth and hard as glass.

This, then, was the awful meaning of the Great Jaws of Death and of that low dreadful grinding sound that seemed to come from all around them.

In five minutes at the most the mighty jaws would meet—and they now stood between them!

In that dreadful moment of horror no one thought of the marvel they were witnessing, nor paused to attempt to discover the how of this strange phenomenon. They could only think, with shuddering horror, of what would happen, when the great rock they were on crushed against the rock of the roof, if they were still between them. Ith's face alone was untroubled.

"Fear not," he encouraged, when he saw the horror come on their faces. "There is time for all to reach safety. But we must be moving. Come," and he started across the floor toward the hole in the opposite wall; and all pressed close behind him.

The rock now began to tremble beneath their feet. The groaning grinding sound increased, until it was deafening; and the floor, to their horrified eyes, appeared to rise with appalling and increasing rapidity. If they should not reach the hole in time—— God, it would be horrible to have their bodies crushed and ground between those two great rocks!

"We must run for it," Ith shouted and broke into a run.

The others followed, their faces white, their eyes fixed on the approaching roof. It looked as if it were dropping down on them.

The floor was now almost up to the hole in the rock.

"Faster!" yelled Ith, increasing his speed.

Again the others responded.

The floor has reached the bottom of the hole; but so has Ith. The others are a few feet behind him.

"In with you," he shouted, pausing at the entrance.

Loretta's foot slipped; and she fell, dragging her father, who had hold of her hand, down with her.

Ith sees the tragedy, leaps to their help, lifts Abel Johnson to his feet and catches Loretta up in his arms.

"Hurry! We can yet make it," he cries, and springs toward the opening, now nearly half closed by the floor.

The others, all unknowing of the fall of Loretta and her father, reach the opening and plunge madly into it.

"All safe?" Professor Kendal calls and turns and looks out just as Ith reaches the opening and throws Loretta into his arms. An instant after he shoves the burly form of her father into the opening, now so small that there is scarce room for the body to pass.

"Hurry!" shouts Professor Kendal in an agony

of fear, lest the floor close the opening before the brave Toltec can get in; and, dropping Loretta, he seizes Abel Johnson by both hands and jerks him violently through the opening.

The hole is now so small that Ith, when half through, sticks and death, a horrible death, seems inevitable. But, at that instant, the great hand of Professor Kendal grips his hand and pulls him through, saving him by so narrow a margin that the sole of one of his sandal-like shoes was shaved off by the passing door.

Ith still had his wonderful lamp; and its rays now illuminated their white faces and the small tunnel-like cave in which they found themselves.

For a couple of minutes no one spoke. All stood motionless, listening, as one might listen for the thud of a falling shell. And then it came, an awful crashing grinding roar and the solid rock around them quivered and strained, until it seemed as if the roof would crash down upon them.

The great jaws had closed!

For at least three minutes the awful sounds and the quivering and the straining of the rock continued, then came silence and the rock became still.

"Once in every twenty-four hours, the great jaws open and shut," Ith explained, breaking the tomb-like silence. "And thus have they opened and shut, at least since the Great Convulsion five hundred years ago, when the Valley of Tollan, all in one dreadful night and day, was ringed round with mountains and cut off completely from the

rest of the world. How or why the great jaws opened and shut we leave with the great God. But, let us hasten," and the look of anxiety came back on his face. "Exitl calls. Come," and holding the lamp above his head, he hurried on along the tunnel-like cave, the others at once following him.

"We are going up! I am sure we are going upward!" Dick exclaimed excitedly a few minutes later. "I can feel that we are going up! My, but I'll be glad to see the sunlight again!"

"So will I," Harry agreed heartily. "I hope there are no more horrors to pass through. I feel as if I had had about all I can hold for one day. Say, but won't this make a great yarn to tell the boys, when we get back to Yahara? I can see their eyes almost popping out of their heads," and Harry grinned in anticipation of the excitement the story of their wonderful adventures would cause in their home-town.

Harry's hope of no more horrors on their way to Tollan was realized. They passed through a succession of weirdly beautiful but tenantless caves, connected here and there by man-made tunnels; and all gradually leading upward. Ith hurried them constantly onward. Time, he declared, was too precious for them to stop for anything, when the way was open before them.

At length, after two hours of steady walking through what are probably the most remarkable caverns in the world, but which, unfortunately, we cannot pause here to describe, they came to a small

cone-shaped chamber, with walls as white and smooth as though fashioned out of alabaster by the hands of man. Near the center of this chamber Ith paused and turned his eyes searchingly on the faces of the others.

"Our journey is almost ended," he said and a deep solemnity came into his voice and on his face. "We are now directly under the Great Pyramid of Quetzalcoatl, and soon we will be in Tollan. But you have come to Tollan in an evil time, when her greatness and her glory have departed, when nothing but the skeleton of what she has been remains. I can show you the skeleton and tell you of the glory; but Tollan, the beautiful, the magnificent, the pride of all Toltecs, you can never know. So wills the great God—and who am I to complain?" and he bowed his head in hopeless but uncomplaining resignation.

All stood silent, awed by the simple grandeur of the grief of this man, who had lived to witness the end of the glory and the greatness of his people; and the sympathetic heart of Loretta flooded her eyes with tears.

For, perhaps, a minute Ith stood motionless, with head bowed, dead to all around him, doubtless visioning the glories that had been but would never be again. Then there came, muffled and far-off-sounding, but still distinct, a deep booming sound, like the beating of many bass drums.

"Great God, forgive me!" and Ith leaped into instant action at the first throb of the booming

sound. "I had forgotten Exitl, the most lovely, and Boowhang, the beast; and that this was the day and the hour. God grant that we be yet in time."

While yet speaking Ith had placed a hand on a small lever, that rose to the height of his waist from the center of the floor; and he now gave it a swift backward pull. Instantly the top of the alabaster cave opened at its center and a beautifully and exquisitely formed elevator-like car dropped down through the opening and came to rest on the floor.

"Thank God the machinery still works!" Ith exclaimed fervently. "Make haste. Into the car with you. The moments are precious with the life blood of Exitl, with the honor of the last of the Toltecs," and he swiftly slid a door open in the side of the car. "Hurry!" and so great was his haste that he began pushing them into the car with his hands.

The instant all were in the car, Ith pulled the door shut and pressed a lever and the car shot rapidly upward. Up through the opening in the roof of the alabaster cave it passed, straight up into a shaft, apparently cut through the living rock, up and up and up, until, just when it seemed as if the shaft had no end, the car, with a slight soft jar, came to a sudden stop.

At this moment the beatings of the great drums, that all this time had sounded in their ears with ever-increasing violence, stopped.

Ith swiftly slid open the door of the car and all stepped out. They stood in a room of wondrous beauty. The walls and the floor and the ceiling were of the finest pure-white marble, delicately and exquisitely carved. At the four corners of the room stood four angels, apparently holding up the ceiling of the room on their outstretched wings.

This much they saw, as their eyes swept swiftly and admiringly around the beautiful room the moment they stepped out of the door; and then, from a marble couch, covered with soft white robes, arose a very old man and stepped eagerly toward them. He was tall and still held himself as straight and as erect as a pine tree and the fires in his eyes still glowed brightly; but his long white beard and hair, fine and soft and shiny as silk threads, and the ethereal refinement of his face, thin and unwrinkled and white and as translucent as the finest porcelain, testified to the great length of the life he had lived. A thin circlet of gold, beautifully chased, encircled the top of his head and held above his forehead a wondrous jewel, that flashed and scintillated with all the colors of the rainbow, and was far more beautiful to the eyes than the diamond or ruby or any other jewel known to the art of our lapidaries. From his shoulders to his feet fell a single robe-like garment, wondrously woven out of small and snowy-white feathers and bound loosely around his waist by a narrow girdle of interwoven threads of gold and silver and fastened with a jeweled buckle.

"My father, the high priest of the Great Temple of Quetzalcoatl, Oth," introduced Ith, as the old man paused in front of Professor Kendal and stood looking at him, the hope of a lifetime glowing on his face and shining in his eyes.

"The sign, the sign," he cried, his voice trembling with excitement. "The Cartouch of Quetzalcoatl; and quickly, for seconds are as precious as life blood. Show me the sign in order that I may know that you are the one of whom it was written: 'On the last day shall come one, bearing as a sign the Cartouch of Quetzalcoatl,'" and he paused, and a slight flush dyed the alabaster whiteness of his cheeks.

Professor Kendal smiled and, thrusting a hand under the bosom of his shirt, drew out the halves of the Cartouch of Gold and handed them to Oth.

With an exclamation of supreme thankfulness and gladness, the old man eagerly seized the two pieces of the cartouch and, with hands that trembled with the intensity of his emotions, fitted them together and fell on his knees before Professor Kendal and humbly bowed his proud white head over his feet and murmured glad and worshipful words in the silver-voiced language of Tollan. A moment he bowed thus; and then he sprang to his feet with astonishing ease and lightness for one so old and frail.

"Now will the heart of Exitl, the beloved, sing with gladness. Now will Boowhang, the beast, roar with rage. Come, there is not a second to

waste," and, stepping quickly to where a wondrously carved doorway showed, he turned to Professor Kendal.

"If my lord so wills, his servant, Oth, will lead the way to the great assembly chamber, where Exitl, the beautiful, and Boowhang, the beast, and the people of Tollan and the men beasts of Boowhang are met," and his eyes rested on the face of Professor Kendal, in supreme confidence.

"All my friends must go with me," and Professor Kendal indicated, with a gesture, the others, who now stood a short distance from him.

"If my lord so wills," and Oth bowed. "But bid them make haste, for time is life."

"Then lead on. We will follow," and Professor Kendal, with Ith by his side and the others following closely, hurried to the spot where Oth stood. Oth pressed a button, the door slid open and all stepped into a beautiful little room, with soft-cushioned seats. As they sank down on the cushions, the room itself shot noiselessly and smoothly upward. Evidently they were in a Toltec elevator.

"Time is too precious to pause now to make plain how matters stand in Tollan," Ith said, as the elevator continued on its way upward, "or to prepare you for what is to come. If you are not Quetzalcoatl himself, but a mortal, even as I am, then surely have you been sent by the god; and, therefore, we will willingly trust you to do the right thing, in the right way, at the right moment,

without further enlightenment; for the time for words has passed and the time for action is here."

As he uttered the last word, the car stopped, with hardly a perceptible jar. Oth instantly slid open the door and, stepping out, bade the others follow him quickly.

They now found themselves in a long marble hall, beautifully adorned and lighted by wonderful lamps, giving the same soft yet powerful radiance that had come from the lamp Ith had carried and which he had left in the room of marble. But so swiftly did Oth hurry them through this hall and so greatly wrought up were their minds, that they took little notice of its beauties and kept their eyes fixed on the tall form of the priest.

The hall ended, apparently, in a blank wall; but Oth pressed with the fingers of his two hands on two different parts of the wall and a door slid noiselessly and smoothly open. They entered a large chamber, with walls and ceiling and floor made of some material that looked to their astonished eyes, like solid masses of opals. Twelve white marble seats, softly cushioned, stood in front of a beautifully carved rostrum of the same wonderful material as the walls; and on this rostrum stood a large marble chair, over which fell a snow-white robe of woven feathers, similar to the one worn by Oth.

"The council chamber of the high priest," Ith said. "Where Oth, my father, holds counsel with the Twelve Patriarchs, the wisest and oldest men

in Tollan. That door," and he pointed to a doorway, above which perched a life-sized owl, seemingly wrought out of pure gold, "opens into the great assembly chamber of the nation, where, even now, Exitl, the lovely, and the people of Tollan are gathered in a last effort to save Exitl from Boowhang, the beast and his beast-men."

While Ith had been speaking, Oth, the high priest, had hurried to the door and had lifted a small pliable tube, with two eyepieces attached to its free end, to his eyes and had been looking anxiously through it. Now he suddenly dropped the tube and turned quickly to Ith and Professor Kendal.

"The dread moment has come," he said. "The sun is setting and even now Boowhang, the beast, is stepping forward to claim Exitl, the lovely, for his bride. My lord," and his glowing eyes looked confidently into the face of Professor Kendal, "the fate of Exitl, the honor of Tollan is in your hands. Enter and confound Boowhang, the beast," and he threw wide open the door and, stepping to one side, waited for Professor Kendal first to pass through it and into the great chamber beyond.

The huge body of Professor Kendal stiffened and straightened. He threw back his great shoulders and his breast swelled with the deep breath he involuntarily drew in and his eyes lighted, until they shone like glowing coals. He knew that the greatest moment of his life had come; and he was summoning every particle of force within him to meet it, as a brave man should.

Through the open door now sounded a confused murmur of many voices, accentuated with harsh guttural grunt-like barks. Then came the sudden bang of a single blow on the head of a great drum, that went crashing into the ears, like the thunder of a big gun.

Professor Kendal gave a violent start and then, as if the drumbeat had been a prearranged signal, he strode through the open door and into the great assembly chamber, followed by Oth and Ith, walking side by side. After them came the others, wonder and awe and dread struggling for place on their faces and their hands holding their rifles ready for instant use.



CHAPTER XXI

BOOWHANG, THE BEAST



THE door opened on a great rostrum that stood at one end of an enormous room, at least a thousand feet long by eight hundred wide, with a high vaulted roof, supported by a single row of enormous pillars, shaped like vast standing owls. This much our friends saw, as they stepped inside the great room and flashed a glance around. Then their attention became concentrated on the astonishing scene taking place before them, which their sudden entrance had evidently interrupted at a most critical juncture and with startling effect.

A pace in front of a great throne-like chair, which stood on the rostrum near the front, and from which she had evidently just arisen, stood a woman of such excellence of form and face, that to call her simply beautiful, as many women are called, would be to insult the high perfections of her body and features. She was gloriously, radiantly a woman, the dream of poets come true. Never had the world seen her like before and never will it see it again. She was simply, yet wondrously dressed in a long gracefully flowing gar-

ment, woven from feathers of humming birds, that radiated colors with every movement of her body. She wore no ornament of any kind and she needed none. Her face was turned toward Professor Kendal, a great joy and an unutterable relief looking out of her eyes.

Six feet in front of her steps led from the rostrum to the main floor; and on these steps, with one foot on the topmost step, stood a monster, a beast-man, with a huge gorilla-like frame and a face in which the man and the beast were struggling for supremacy. He was at least eight feet tall and the huge arms and the enormous chest told of a strength that was almost supernatural. Short thick red hair covered his body and rose stiffly in a crest on top of his head. Evidently he had made a rude attempt to shave his face, for the hair had been cut off close to the skin, which showed a ghastly bluish white and added to the terror and horror of his countenance. Panther skins hung from his shoulders and girdled his waist. Otherwise he stood naked and unashamed. He carried no weapons; and he needed none in unarmed Tolan. His face also was turned toward Professor Kendal, a wolfish snarl showing his fang-like teeth and deadly hate looking out of his little red eyes. There was no fear in his look, only animal-like astonishment that was fast changing into rage.

Thus stood Exitl, the gloriously beautiful, and Boowhang, the beast. Not ten feet separated

them. Almost could the great arms of Boowhang reach out and grip her where she stood.

Back of Exitl, crowding close and protectingly behind her, was, perhaps, a hundred weaponless men, of the same tall and noble appearance as Ith, but lacking his look of strength and refinement. A frail guard that Boowhang could destroy almost with one sweep of his huge hands. But back of Boowhang was a hundred or more huge ape-men, differing only in size and unshaven faces from Boowhang himself. They also were weaponless; but what need of weapons had such as they in defenseless Tollan?

Such was the scene that met the eyes of Professor Kendal and those with him, the moment they stepped through the door of the council chamber and into the great assembly room. It needed no interpreter to tell that tragedy was imminent, with the huge beast-man and the lovely woman as the leads.

Professor Kendal's eyes flamed the moment they rested on the face of Exitl and his cheeks flushed; and an answering flame and flush came in the eyes and on the fair cheeks of Exitl.

Who can decipher the mysteries of love? or tell why love comes? or why love goes? In that swift interchange of glances, with death in the form of Boowhang looking on, love leaped joyously into the heart of each; and, for one blissful moment, crowded out all else, as heart answered heart.

Boowhang broke the spell.

"I have come for my woman," his deep guttural voice boomed, as his eyes, hot with desire, turned to the face of Exitl, Ith who now stood by the side of Professor Kendal interpreting. "She is mine. Long have I waited; but now I wait no longer. She is mine and by the right of my strong arms I will hold her. She is mine. I will kill all who come between me and my woman," and he stepped full upon the rostrum.

In one great jump, Professor Kendal, who had paused not fifteen feet away from where Exitl stood, sprang in front of her and faced the giant ape-man, his rifle held so that a touch on the trigger would send the heavy bullet smashing through his brain.

"One step forward and you die," he roared, all unmindful that Boowhang could not understand a word he uttered.

The lust of battle came into Boowhang's eyes. Great was his joy in a great fight. But now he was fighting for his woman, as his ancestors had fought for their women for unnumbered generations and jealous rage was added to his battle joy. He threw back his head and uttered his harsh roar of defiance and beat upon his great chest with his huge hammer-like fists, as the great bull apes, his ancestors, had always done before attacking.

Professor Kendal stood ready, every muscle and every nerve tense, his finger resting lightly on the trigger of his rifle and his eyes watching the eyes

of Boowhang, the beast. He, too, was fighting for his woman.

"Slay him not, my lord. He is yet a wild beast and knows not what he does. I will tame him," and, before Professor Kendal knew what she was doing, Exitl stepped suddenly in front of him and confronted Boowhang, the beast, unafraid, trusting in the power she knew she held over him, the charm of her womanhood and the force of her personality to bend him to her will, as doubtless she had bent his wild nature before.

But Boowhang was beyond taming. His wild savage nature was in complete sway. He was the bull ape again, about to seize his mate by force and ready to fight all rivals. Suddenly his passion-inflamed eyes saw Exitl, standing in front of him in all her womanly beauty, within reach of his great arms; and, with a cry of exultation, heedless of her commands, he sprang forward, flung his great arms around her tender body, whirled about and bore her away, her body pressed tightly against his hairy breast.

Professor Kendal stood for an instant like one in a trance, then his rifle leaped to his shoulder, was held there an instant, steady as a rock; and then, just as Boowhang reached the main floor and was about to leap into the midst of his ape-men with his precious burden, the red flame leaped from it.

Boowhang stopped suddenly and half-turned, a dazed look in his eyes and the wild savageness gone

out of his face. He looked down at Exitl, lying white-faced and trembling in his arms. Something akin to repentance must have come into his savage heart; for he loosened his arms from around her, fell on his knees at her feet, lifted the hem of her garment to his lips and—collapsed, as if his muscles had been suddenly turned into water, and lay motionless on the floor, dead. At the end his better nature had triumphed.

Professor Kendal, the instant after he had fired, had leaped to the rescue of Exitl; and, as Boowhang, the beast, fell at her feet, he caught her up in his arms and sprang back on the rostrum, just as the ape-men, maddened by the loss of their leader, leaped furiously toward him, with the most dreadful roars of rage that ever fell on human ears. On they rushed; and it seemed as if nothing human could stop them.

"Pick your man and fire." Cool and sharp came the command of Captain Kent; and the next moment the report of six rifles sounded as one, and six of the foremost ape-men spun about on their feet and fell sprawlingly to the floor.

"Give them another volley," again commanded Captain Kent; and again the six rifles spoke and again six ape-men fell, pierced by bullets from those deadly rifles.

The ape-men stopped, stunned by the noise, terrified by the death that came like lightning with the thunder. Never before in all Tollan had weapon been raised against them. Surely these

strange men must be gods, or, at least, devils, to hold death in their hands, as they held arrows. Nothing but death was to be gained fighting gods or devils. Besides they had no weapons with them. With weapons in their hands they might fight even gods or devils.

Some such reasonings as these must have flashed through their agitated minds; for, suddenly, they whirled about, caught up their dead and fled out of the great door in the far end of the room.

The last ape-man out, a huge giant, second only to Boowhang in size, paused at the door, turned and, beating his great fists on his hairy chest, shouted threats and defiance.

"That was Whang, son of Boowhang, the beast," Ith said. "He was kind enough to inform us that he and his ape-men would be back soon, that, when they came, he would exact the most dreadful vengeance for the killing of Boowhang and his men and would kill every living thing in Tollan, save only Exitl. She he would carry off and make his woman. This he vowed he would do by all the dread gods of his people. And, if he is a true son of Boowhang, all this will he do. Alas!" and Ith's eyes turned to the red spot on the floor, "killing has again been done in Tollan."

"And well done," and Oth turned a face that had grown stern and hard to Ith. "The killing has been well done. Would to God it had been done before! Then the history of Tollan might have been differently written. Love and gentleness are

powerful, when they contend with love and gentleness; but avail not to face brute force and brute ferocity. That is the lesson writ into the history of Tollan by the hand of bitter experience. Alas, that this wisdom should come to Tollan at so late an hour! But, even thus was it written in the great books of the prophets; and, what the gods will, man does," and he bowed his head and stood silent.

For a brief moment after the ape-men had fled, Professor Kendal stood, holding Exitl in his arms, each forgetful of all else save the other's near presence. Then Exitl stirred softly and spoke.

"My lord," she said, lifting her shining eyes to his face, "I would thank you for saving my poor life and do fitting homage," and slipping out of his arm, she fell on her knees and bowed her head over his feet.

Professor Kendal bent quickly and lifted her to her feet.

"It is not fitting that you should kneel at my feet," he said. "Rather we should stand side by side."

Ith, who had been watching the two, a half-smile on his face, now stepped in front of Professor Kendal and bowed.

"My lord," he declared, "we owe you thanks for saving our most precious jewel, Exitl, the beloved of all, from Boowhang, the beast; and thanks and our service to the utmost you shall have. But surely my lord and my lord's friends are in need

of food and rest. After your hunger has been satisfied and a long sleep has rested your bodies, then will we talk and make plain things that you do not now understand. Now, if my lord so wills, we will go to your resting places, where I will have food and change of garments brought you." Ith paused and stood waiting.

"You certainly are right. We do need food and sleep and will go with you at once," Professor Kendal answered quickly.

"Then come with me, my lord; and bid your friends follow after us," and Ith started toward a door that opened on the opposite side of the rostrum from the one through which they had entered.

Professor Kendal, before following Ith, turned to Exitl and begged her to excuse him for the present and expressed the hope that he might see her again soon.

She smiled and bade him go and get the food and rest he so much needed, promising to see him again soon after he awoke.

As Professor Kendal turned to follow Ith, Oth, the high priest, his face still sad and stern from his bitter thoughts, spoke.

"Go, my lord, and rest in peace," he said. "And let not thoughts of Whang trouble your sleep. For a week at least we are safe from him and his apemen. May the gods give you pleasant dreams and restful slumbers," and he bowed.

Professor Kendal at once hurried to where Ith stood at the door and the others followed gladly.

Indeed, all were nearly famished and so tired and sleepy, now that the excitement was over, that they could hardly keep on their feet; for they had had no food nor sleep, since their capture by Holy Miguel nearly forty-eight hours before.

"The glory of Tollan has departed forever, her greatness is no more," Ith said, as he opened the door and all stepped into another elevator that at once shot upward; "so that now we cannot care for you fittingly, nor as we would like, nor as we might have done, when Tollan, the beautiful, was the glory of the Toltec nation and her people, prosperous and happy, crowded her now deserted streets. But, what we have, we give freely from the heart; and we want you to accept it as coming freely from the heart. A few of our most faithful servants are still with us and they will wait on you. Command their services freely."

The car stopped. Ith slid open the door and all stepped out into a beautiful hall, lighted, as all things in Tollan were lighted, by that marvelous light that had so greatly awakened their wonder and curiosity. On each side of the hall, at regular intervals, were a number of doors, with a small gold owl perched above each. Before the largest of these doors Ith paused.

"This was the suite of the last king of Tollan, who voluntarily gave up his throne two hundred and seventy-three years ago. Since then the suite has been dedicated to the use of our most distinguished guests. Enter and use all that you

find within as your own." Ith pressed a gold button in the side of the door-frame and a great door opened; or, rather, two doors slid noiselessly open. At the same moment the room within lit up, revealing a large reception room.

Ith stepped into the room and the others followed, the door closing noiselessly behind them. A moment later a door on each side of the room opened; and to the astonishment of our friends, out of the door at the right stepped two young ape-women and out of the door at the left stepped a number of young ape-men. All wore a single blue garment, woven out of the finest and softest of silk and embroidered with gold owls and writhing silver serpents. The garment fell from the shoulders to within six inches of their feet and was girdled about the waist by a red scarf. Their feet and arms and the part of the legs showing were bare and had been clean shaven, as also had been their faces. The two ape-women wore small white caps on their heads, while the heads of the men were bare. This was the only difference in the dress of the sexes.

"For over five hundred years we have trained ape-men and ape-women to be our servants," and Ith smiled at their very evident astonishment. "Boowhang himself was once my own servant. Only within the past twenty-five years have we had any trouble with them. But this tale will do for another time. Now you are too tired and hungry and sleepy to have the patience to listen to any tale.

The servants will show you to your separate rooms and will bring you food. You will find a bath-room opening off each sleeping-room, where you can refresh yourselves with a bath and put on clean garments before eating and sleeping. It will be about fifteen minutes, according to your way of reckoning time, before food will be ready. On the wall of each room you will find a small ivory call-board, containing three different colored buttons. If you wish to summon me, press the white button; if you wish to summon one of the servants, press a blue button; and, if you wish to put out or turn on the light, press the black button. When you are awake and are ready for another day's activities, press the white button twice. Now, if you will excuse me, I will give the servants their instructions," and he turned to the ape-servants, who had halted at a respectful distance away and spoke to them in the pleasant-sounding Toltec language.

"I know my lord and my lord's friends are too tired to care to talk," and Ith again turned to Professor Kendal; "and so I will bid you good-night, hoping you will have a long and restful sleep," and with a respectful bow to Professor Kendal and one inclusive bow to all the others, he backed himself out of the door of the room, the door closed noiselessly behind him and Professor Kendal and his party were left to the tender mercies of the ape-men and ape-women servants.

To their very great surprise they found that the ape-men and the ape-women made almost perfect

servants, quiet, willing and efficient; but our friends could not accustom themselves to their half-animal and half-human faces, nor repress a creepy-crawly feeling, as Loretta expressed it, every time one of them came near.

All followed Ith's suggestion and took a bath, while waiting for their food to be brought. After the bath they dressed themselves in the soft cool garments they found awaiting them in the bathroom. Ape-men now entered, bearing their food, which consisted of fruits and a few very savory concoctions, the composition of which was unknown to them, on thin gold salvers. Our friends were so sleepy and tired that, as soon as they had eaten, they tumbled into their beds and almost immediately fell into a sleep so sound that they were dead to all the world around them.



THE GREAT PYRAMID

WHEN Dick and Harry awoke, they had insisted on both sleeping in the same room, they found the room still dark; but, the moment they arose and placed their feet on the floor, dark curtains, from windows opening in all sides of the chamber, rolled up and the room was flooded with bright sunlight.

"Say, but this is bully!" Dick exclaimed, as he rose to his feet and his eyes circled the room. "Beats any hotel I was ever in about ten million miles. I never before felt such a soft rug under my feet. Feels like—— Great Scott!" and down on his hands and knees dropped the excited boy, "it's woven out of down, feathers! and is about an inch thick!"

"Yes, but have you noticed the bedstead?" Harry, too, was getting excited. "It looks as if it were made out of solid gold; and the frames of those pictures on the walls I am sure are gold, too; and the walls——" Harry stopped in amaze-

ment; for as he spoke hundreds of small lattice-like openings appeared in the walls and the ceiling of the room and, almost instantly, the room became filled with cool fresh and delicately perfumed air. And, even while they stood staring at them, the openings closed, only to open again at the end of sixty seconds and again flood the room with fresh air.

"Why, the room breathes!" and Harry's face pictured his astonishment. "The air is drawn in and forced out, just as if the room had a pair of lungs. This beats all kinds of ventilation I ever heard of before."

"Oh, Harry, come here!" Dick, who had approached one of the windows, almost shouted, as he looked out. "I never saw such a wonderful sight before."

Harry at once ran to the window and looked out; and his exclamations of surprise and amazement were as loud as Dick's had been.

Stretching out for miles before and below them lay the great city of Tollan, sparkling and glowing in the bright light of the morning sun.

"Why," gasped Harry, "the buildings all look as if they were made out of the purest white marble from the bottom to the top, joined together in the most wonderful manner," and, in his eagerness, he attempted to lean out of the window, which appeared to be open, and bumped his nose quite violently against a huge and perfectly transparent pane that filled the entire window-frame. At the

same moment Dick thrust out a hand and the hand hit the window pane hard enough to hurt his knuckles.

"Gee-mi-ma!" he exclaimed, as he moved his hand up and down the invisible pane, "but this is some glass!"

"I have it!" Harry, who had been doing some thinking since he bumped his nose, cried excitedly. "The window pane is made out of Oxtl, the invisible metal, like that wonderful bridge through the Snake Caverns of Ooze. The Toltecs have discovered how to make a perfectly transparent metal. I read not long ago how our chemists and metallurgists have been trying to do that very same thing for a thousand years and have never succeeded. Hurrah for the Toltecs! And—and," his eyes fairly sparkled with excitement, "those wonderful buildings are all built out of the same kind of metal, which they are doubtless able to color the same way we do glass. Why, the walls and the floor and the ceiling of this room are made out of Oxtl, colored to suit the taste of the artist who designed them."

"But, but, where do you suppose we are?" cried Dick, a puzzled expression coming on his face. "We seem to be much higher than any building I can see and some of them are very high."

"We——" and Harry, too, looked puzzled. "I wish we could open this window, so that we could lean out and look down. There must be a way," and he began studying the window and its frame.

"I wonder——" and he pressed a small ivory button that showed on one side of the window-frame.

There was a slight scraping sound and, when Harry thrust out his hand, the window pane had vanished.

"The window is open!" he cried and eagerly thrust his head out and looked down.

Dick promptly followed his example and, a moment later, exclamations of astonishment came from both boys. They were looking down from the flat top of an enormous pyramid, on one of the four corners of which the building in which they were had been erected. So enormous was this pyramid that its flat top must have been nearly two thousand feet above the level of the valley from which it arose and the top itself at least a city block in extent.

"Great Moses, but these Toltecs did things in a big way!" Harry exclaimed, as his eyes took in the tremendous proportions of the pyramid. "What a wonderful view we have from here?" and his eyes roamed over the remarkable scene.

Below them lay the wonderful Valley of Tollan. The pyramid had been built near the western end of the valley, so that almost its entire extent lay beneath their eyes, shining in the rays of the early morning sun. The valley looked to be nearly a hundred miles long and some fifty miles wide and was completely surrounded by an almost precipitous wall of high mountains. Through the center of the valley flowed a river and seven small lakes,

five of them connected with the river could be seen. Great clouds of steam rose from the surface of one of the unconnected lakes and the waters of the other showed yellow in the bright sunlight, as if impregnated with brimstone. For miles on both banks of the river rose the buildings of this marvelous white city in a dream of architectural beauty and splendor never before realized by man. There was not a spot of dark color anywhere, nor yet were they a glaring white, but the dull perfect white of pure marble. Many of the buildings occupied an entire block and were very high. Indeed, Harry counted one seventy-five stories high from where he stood looking out of that lofty window. All were in architectural harmony, as if one mind had conceived and planned them all.

Suddenly Harry started and a puzzled, horrified expression came on his face.

"Dick, Dick!" he exclaimed. "No one is moving on the streets and I can see no evidence of life in any of the buildings. From the size of the city one might expect to see millions of human beings. What can it mean?"

"I can't understand it," Dick answered. "It must have taken millions of people to build those great buildings and this enormous pyramid. What can have happened to them? A dead white city!" and Dick shuddered. "But, let us get our clothes on. I am anxious to get out and find out things," and he turned from the window.

At that moment Bill Burke entered from a little

adjoining room, where he had slept, his face the picture of consternation and horror and his black body clothed in a long nightgown-like garment.

"Massah Dick," he cried, the moment he caught sight of the two boys. "Massah Dick," and then he stopped and a broad grin began spreading all over his face, as he saw that they, too, were clothed in nightgowns similar to his own. "Fo' Gawd, if dey ain't done gib yo' nightgowns to wear, same as me!" he cried. "Gosh a'might, I done wish de boys back home could see yo' in dem gowns! Yo' shore do look scrumptuous," and he almost choked in an effort to keep his laugh inside.

Dick and Harry both cast hasty glances around the room in search of the garments they had taken off before going to bed; and a look of horror and consternation came on their faces when they discovered that they were gone. Their rifles, revolvers, hunting-knives and belts still lay on the chair near the head of the bed, where they had placed them on going to bed; but not a sign of their clothes could they see.

"Well, I'll be dumfiddled!" Dick exclaimed. "They certainly can't expect us to appear in public in this rig. I——" Suddenly he began to grin, then to laugh. "Holy smoke! but won't Professor Kendal look great parading around the streets of Tollan in a nightgown!"

Harry, too, grinned at the vision Dick had conjured up, then his face sobered.

"Well," he declared, "I'm not going to let an old

nightgown keep me in my room. I am loaded with questions I want to ask somebody. Come, let us see how we look when we are nightgowned and armed for the fray," and he began strapping his revolver and cartridge belt around his waist and shoulders and over his white nightgown. This done, he strode over to a full-length mirror that graced one side of the room, trying to look as war-like as was possible in a nightgown.

Dick and Bill Burke both roared with laughter at the comical sight Harry presented.

"Cowboy Jim would sure shoot you on sight," Dick laughed. "And Loretta, well, I'd like to see Loretta's face when she first catches sight of you in a rig like that."

Harry flushed at the thought of Loretta seeing him in such a dress, then he grew angry.

"I'm not going to stand for this sort of thing. I'm going to have my clothes back or know the reason why," and he strode over to the little ivory call-board, placed on the wall near the head of the bed and pressed the white button twice.

Almost instantly a door, which they had taken for a framed painting, slid open in the side of the wall near where they were standing, revealing a closet-like aperture, in which hung their clothes, newly washed and pressed. Even their boots had been cleaned.

"Well, I'll be dumfiddled again!" Dick laughed. "This is beginning to act like an Arabian Nights' tale of adventure. Anyway I'll seize my clothes

while they are in sight," and he hurriedly possessed himself of his garments and began putting them on, Harry quickly following his example.

"Golly!" and Bill Burke's eyes began to roll, "I's gwine to punch dat putton in mah room," and he dashed back into the little room where he had slept.

Ten minutes later Dick and Harry and Bill Burke, dressed in their usual garments were ready to venture forth.

"But, once outside the door, where shall we go? What shall we do?" Harry questioned. "I should think Ith would come himself or send someone for us. He——"

At that moment there came a knock on the door. Harry opened it and the same ape-man who had shown them their room, stepped in and, bowing, handed Harry a folded piece of paper and stood waiting.

Harry quickly unfolded the paper and read its contents. It bade them, as soon as they were dressed and ready, follow Wox, the ape-man, who would conduct them to the dining-room, where breakfast would be served, and requested them to leave their weapons and ammunition in their room, except their revolvers and a few rounds of cartridges for them. The note was in Professor Kendal's handwriting and written on a leaf torn out of his note-book and signed by him, so they could not doubt its genuineness; and they at once

signified to Wox that they were ready to accompany him.

Wox again bowed and led the way out of the room, through a long hall and into a large dining-room, where, to their surprise, Dick and Harry found the others already seated at a long table, one end of which joined the wall at the far end of the room. The table was bare and looked as if it were made out of polished white marble; but, in reality, it was only another example of the use they made of the marvelous metal, Oxtl.

"Oh, you lazy boys!" laughed Loretta, the moment they entered the room. "Do hurry. I am almost starved and you have kept us waiting at least two minutes."

"Sorry," grinned Dick, as he and Harry hurried to the table and sat down; "but Harry was delayed a little in his dressing."

Loretta looked a little curiously at Harry, who blushed; but refrained from pursuing the subject further.

Ith sat at the head of the table; and, the moment Dick and Harry were seated and the greetings were all over, he glanced down the rows of interested and wondering faces; for, as yet, the table was absolutely bare and not a sign of a servant or food had they seen.

"We could never quite reconcile ourselves to the presence of ape-men and ape-women while eating," and Ith smiled; "and so we have devised this method of having our food served," and he pressed

one of a number of differently colored buttons that projected from a peculiar little black board that lay on the table by the side of his plate.

Instantly a wide belt, so deftly fitted and colored as to defy detection by the eyes and running lengthwise through the center of the table, began moving; and a door, wide as the moving belt, opened above it in the side of the room to which the table was attached; and, from the room beyond, the belt came out laden with food and dishes, properly prepared and arranged for each person sitting at the table. When the food arrived in front of the diners, Ith pressed another button; and their breakfast stood before our friends.

"Now," and again Ith smiled at the looks of pleased astonishment on the faces of his guests, "while you are eating I will explain some of the things that I am sure have awakened your interest and wonder. What does my lord first wish to hear about?" and he turned to Professor Kendal.

Professor Kendal hesitated a moment, as he ran over the many pressing queries in his mind, then his face cleared.

"Life comes first," he said. "Therefore we would first hear of the great danger that threatens us—Whang and his ape-men; so that we can prepare to face it and to defeat it, if possible. How soon may we expect Whang to fulfil his threat and attack Tollan? And what defense has Tollan against him?"

"Alas!" and a cloud swept over the fine face of

Ith, "Tollan is defenseless against the hordes of monsters Whang can bring against her! Out of all the multitudes of prosperous and happy Toltecs that once made this valley populous, only one hundred and two men and Exitl, the flower of all womanhood are left. Tollan is manless, defenseless and weaponless. She could not fight, if she would; and she would not fight, if she could. For many centuries her people have been taught that it is wrong to take life, even in defending life; and not for five hundred years has a weapon of war been seen in the hands of a Toltec. No, Tollan cannot defend herself. All things are now in the hands of my lord. Alas, that so great and glorious a people, should come to such an ignoble end!"

"But," and Professor Kendal's impatience showed in his voice, "what other end could you expect from such a living? Human life is a battle; and man or nation, who will not fight when the oppressor or enslaver comes, must perish. Such is the law of nature and nature's God. Man must abide by it or suffer the consequences. Now," and his voice hardened, "tell me when we may expect this attack of Whang and his ape-men. I assure you that I and those with me have no conscientious scruples against taking life in defending our own lives; and we have weapons and we will fight as long as we have life. How much time have we to make ready for the coming of Whang?"

Ith's face had flushed a little at Professor Ken-

dal's words; but, when he spoke, it was in his usual quiet tone of voice.

"No one can tell for certain when the blow will fall," he said; "but Whang should need a week, possibly more, to make his ape-men ready for so great an attack, now that he knows he has to fight you, with your wonderful weapons that shoot flames and kill from afar. A great fight, doubtless, my lord and his men will make; but it will be in vain. For how can six men fight five thousand such monsters as Whang can command?"

"I know not what the end will be; but this I know, if Whang attacks us, while we are here, we will fight," and Professor Kendal's jaws came together with a snap. "But why should we, why should you and those with you who are yet alive in Tollan, why should we remain here to glut the savage vengeance of that horde of beasts? There is a way out of Tollan."

"Not now," Ith spoke solemnly. "Last night the red gods of the underworld raged in Tollan, as they have not raged before for a hundred years; and the walls of the tunnel leading from the alabaster chamber to the caverns in the bowels of the earth, the only way out, were broken and the tunnel filled up. Even this great pyramid trembled. I, who sleep lightly, felt it. This morning I searched and found the way out sealed by the hand of God. Here you are and here we are and here we all must stay until the end. For, is it not written in the Great Book of the Prophets: 'On that dread day,



all, man and woman, boy and girl and the laughing babe, all who dwell in Tollan, shall perish and the great city shall be completely destroyed.' Thus is it written and thus will it be. Now I know that Quetzalcoatl, if, indeed, you be not Quetzalcoatl himself, has sent you to take the souls of the faithful back with you to paradise. For again is it not written even on the Cartouch of Quetzalcoatl: 'Of a surety will I come back to my people on the great day that shall see the end of their once mighty race and take back with me to paradise the souls of the faithful.' That day has come and you are here. When the gods speak, all must listen; and the gods spoke when the only way out of Tollan was closed."

"The gods be damned!" Professor Kendal was becoming wrathful over Ith's strange theology. "Our concern is not with the gods; but with Whang and how best to defeat him. If the road out of Tollan is closed, then we must fight. After eating we will go about the city and see where and how this can best be done."

"No," and Ith slowly shook his head. "The city and all of its buildings, save only the Great Pyramid, on whose summit this building stands, are now in the hands of the ape-men and have been in their hands for a year. It would be death for us to show ourselves outside of the walls of this great building. Up to the present time the ape-men have been unable to break into the pyramid; but there is little comfort in this; for a year is a long time and we have food left but for six days and

no way of getting more. If my lord knows a way out of our present peril, let him speak."

For a moment Professor Kendal sat silent. Like rats they appeared to be caught in a trap, with no way out. Life was now doubly dear to him. Fame waited but the publication of his great discovery; and he had seen Exitl, the wonderful, the beautiful, the crowning glory of all womanhood. Surely, with all that he had hoped for, with more than he had hoped for within his grasp, fate would not, could not wrest it from him and throw him death, a horrible unknown death. Hope, confidence, almost certainty came back to him; and he answered Ith with a grim smile on his face.

"Put courage in your heart and have faith in yourself," he cheered. "We shall yet win out in spite of Whang and all his ape-men. How, I know not now. But this much is certain, fate has not brought me here, through so many difficulties and perils, but to give my body over to be torn to pieces by Whang's giant ape-men, nor yet to be starved like a rat in this great pile. Later we will talk more of Whang and how best to defeat him. Now," and the hard look came back on his face, "I would know how this great city came into the possession of the ape-men? what has become of the people of Tollan? and why Exitl is the only woman left living?"



THE MASSACRE OF A NATION

FOR a moment Ith sat silent, his eyes looking straight ahead, yet seeing nothing present. Evidently he was pondering Professor Kendal's queries and how best to answer them.

"There is but one answer to all your three questions—Boowhang, the beast, whom you fortunately killed," at length he answered. "And this is how he came to be the answer.

"The ape-men, who live in the far end of the valley and on the steep sides of the tree-overgrown mountains, have long hated us and would have done us harm long ago, if they had dared. But fear and awe of us, as the builders of this mighty city and the doers of other great things that to them seemed more the work of gods than of human beings, kept them in subjection. Besides, we always held a son of their king and the children of their chiefs as hostages for their good behavior. Boowhang, son of the king, was such a hostage and my servant. On an evil day, over a year ago, he saw Exitl; and, in his wild animal way, loved her, as, indeed, all must who see her. Day by day his evil passion grew, until it overcame all his fear

and awe; and then one night he and Whang, his son and almost as large and powerful as was Boowhang himself, broke through the door of Exitl's bedroom, killed the three girls who slept in the room with her, seized her and attempted to carry her off with them to the mountains. But, fortunately, I and others heard her screams and rushed to her rescue.

"You saw Boowhang and Whang and know what monsters they were, each with the strength of ten such men as we are.

"We came upon them in the Great Hall of Justice. We had no weapons. There was not a weapon in all Tollan. But naked handed we sprang upon them and attempted to wrest Exitl from the grip of Boowhang, who held her clasped to his side with his left arm, while he crushed and smashed us with his great right hand. Whang fought at his left side, making it doubly difficult to reach Exitl. And, when they felt our bones crunch beneath the blows of their great fists and saw us fall lifeless to the floor, then Boowhang and Whang laughed; for they knew now that we were mortals and could be slain. Every time they struck they laughed and bared their great dog-like teeth. Ah, that was a dreadful struggle," and Ith's face whitened. "Never may I see another like it! But our men poured into the hall, until there were hundreds against the two. At last I saw my opportunity. Whang was dragged to the floor. Boowhang staggered under the weight of a dozen men,



who clung to his arms and neck and shoulders and legs, wherever they could get a hold. For a moment I saw his great arm loosen around Exitl; and in that moment I sprang in and tore her from his grip and leaped off with her out of the great hall.

"I know not what followed. I have never asked; but Boowhang and Whang both escaped.

"A week later we heard that Boowhang had killed the king, his father, and had had himself declared king. Then came weeks of silence, during which we neither heard nor saw anything of Boowhang, the beast, and his ape-men; and we had begun to hope that he would trouble us no more. Then came the great blow, the direst that ever struck an unsuspecting and happy people."

Ith paused and bowed his head for a moment and his bosom heaved with his emotions, then the look of patient hopeless resignation came back on his face and he continued.

"The day of our great national festival came, when all the people of Tollan, young and old, male and female, gathered in flower-decked boats on the quiet waters of Lake Uxiti; and, moving toward the center of the lake, sang songs of praise and thankfulness to Oitl, goddess of the falling waters, for the abundance of rain she had given to our growing grain and fruits to drink. So great was the multitude of people on that day that the water of the lake, although the largest in all Tollan, was fairly covered with boats and looked like a great floating garden. All were supremely happy; for

Oitl had been extremely kind to us that year; and not a thought of danger came to any one.

"Exitl was queen of the day; and she it was who bore our special greetings and thanks to Oitl. She sat under a flower-decked canopy in a great boat, rowed by fifty strong oarsmen and capable of carrying five hundred passengers; and with her sat Oth, the high priest, and I sat by his side; and in the boat around us on all sides were all the great of Tollan.

"We reached the center of the lake and Exitl was about to drop into the water the jeweled crown, our thank offering to Oitl, when from the direction of all the surrounding shore arose the most dreadful cry ear of man ever heard, the cry of women and babes and little children and strong men being hideously slaughtered. We sprang to our feet and stood, staring, stunned, dumbfounded, not comprehending what the awful horror meant.

"Then someone shouted: 'Our people are being killed, murdered!'

"A moment later came the cry: 'The ape-men! The ape-men!'

"I sprang on top of the canopy and looked.

"God of my people! what a sight for human eyes! Boowhang and his ape-men were massacring a nation! On all sides was horrible confusion. The ape-men, armed with great bows and arrows and long spears, stood in a great circle around the shores of the lake, shooting the people in the boats with their arrows and thrusting their spears into

all who tried to reach the shore. We made no defense. Weaponless we could not; and to kill, even to save life, was forbidden.

"The slaughter was dreadful. In the boats on the water the people were helpless. Thousands upon thousands were slaughtered there. The lake ran red with blood, the blood of wives and mothers and maids and innocent babes and little children, as well as that of strong men. All that could crowded together in the center of the lake. But the ape-men now sprang into boats; and still thrust with their spears and shot their arrows. And, as they killed, they laughed and barked and shouted, frenzied with the lust of blood.

"I could look no longer and sprang from the canopy. A dreadful tumult now broke out on the boat; but Exitl sprang to her feet, the glory of a great soul in her eyes.

" 'Let us not perish, if perish we must, like timid rabbits,' she said, speaking calmly, though her face was white; 'but meet death bravely with a smile, and show these beasts that we are men and women. Let us honor Tollan and ourselves dying, as we always have living. But,' and she looked from Oth to me and then swept the circle of faces around her, 'is there no escape? It would be sin to yield our lives to Boowhang, the beast, and his ape-men, without doing our utmost to escape.'

" 'Escape for a few, yes; for many, no,' Oth, the high priest, answered. 'This is the day of doom for Tollan, foretold of old by the prophets.

For thus is it written: "On that dread day the waters of the lake shall run red with blood and the cries of slaughtered thousands burden the air." Thus it is written and thus shall it be; for the prophets spoke with the tongues of truth. Alas, that the glory and greatness of Tollan and her people should come to such a terrible ending!" and Oth bowed his head, the burden of a dying nation on his soul.

"'But,' and Exitl threw back her beautiful head and the courage of a great soul looked out of her eyes, 'shall we tamely wait here the coming of the arrows and the spears and the great clubs and the monsters that tear the white throat with the teeth? No, by all that is glorious in the past of Tollan, no. Let us all and at once drive our boats straight to the shore, where the steps of the Gold Temple go down to the waters of the lake. Perchance some of us may reach the temple; and, once inside and the great doors closed, we are safe for a time at least from Boowhang, the beast, and his beast-men. At the least we will then perish, striving bravely, and die not like trembling rabbits. Men of Tollan, what say you?' Her clear voice rang out above that awful and hideous clamor.

"'Lead and we will follow, oh Queen. We will protect you with our lives,' answered the men in a great shout that heartened the souls of all of us.

"'Then let all the boats drive straight for the Gold Temple and pause not, though we fall by thousands. Forward! and may the God of our

fathers protect us! Boatmen, put all the strength of your bodies into your oars. This day you are rowing a race with death,' and, turning to her own boatmen, Exitl ordered them to drive straight toward the steps of the Gold Temple.

"Then fear and confusion seemed to leave the hearts of all and all drove their boats in one great solid mass toward the Gold Temple, singing and shouting joyously, as if, indeed, they were returning home from a great triumph, singing and shouting until the arrow struck, or the spear pierced, or the club fell.

"Ah, then I was proud of the people of Tollan, proud to see them meet death so gloriously, since death must be met.

"At last Boowhang, the beast, caught sight of Exitl in the great boat; and, even where we were, we could hear his roar of triumph, as lifting his bloody spear and great club, he pointed toward her and then drove his boat furiously in her direction.

"But the brave people of Tollan saw and understood and instantly a thousand oarsmen thrust their boats and their bodies in the way. Through them Boowhang raged, thrusting with his spear, striking with his club and even biting with his teeth; and by his side raged a hundred of his chosen men.

"Now the great boat of Exitl has almost reached the landing at the foot of the steps of the Gold Temple; but Boowhang, the beast, also has almost reached the boat. A moment more and the foaming prow crashed into the sand by the side of the

landing; and, at the same moment, Boowhang and his ape-men, with great bark-like shouts of triumph, leaped on board the boat, not ten feet from where Exitl was crowding toward the landing. But a solid wall of human beings reared itself between them, glad to give their lives to save the life of Exitl. When one fell another leaped into his place. The deck became slippery with blood, piled with dead bodies, horrid with the hoarse laughs of the ape-men; and over the bodies climbed Boowhang, the beast, ever nearer to Exitl, until at last he reached out his great hand and seized the flowing garment in which she was dressed and pulled her toward him.

"An awful cry of horror and despair went up from all our people and a hundred men threw themselves upon Boowhang, the beast.

"At that dread moment the gods came to the assistance of Exitl.

"The floor of the deck cracked under the weight of the struggling men and beasts; and then crashed down to the bottom of the boat, carrying Boowhang and those fighting with him down with it. At the same moment I reached the side of Exitl and caught her up in my arms, just as she was being drawn down backward by the strong hand of Boowhang into that dreadful pit of struggling men and beasts. The piece of dress in Boowhang's hand tore loose and I leaped, with her still in my arms, upon the landing and bore her swiftly up the steps into the temple, before a beast-man could

reach us; and after us plunged a great mass of our people.

"Here a deed of such bravery and greatness of soul was done by the men of Tollan that it will gladden the heart of my lord," and the face of Ith glowed with the pride of race. "On the threshold of safety, when almost within the great doors of the temple, a thousand or more men deliberately turned and devoted their unprotected and defenseless bodies to death and to the horrible rage of Boowhang, the beast, and his ape-men, who by now were raging up the steps of the temple, in order to give us who were with Exitl time to close and bar the great doors. A noble and brave sacrifice and successful; for we had swung the last of the great bars into its place before the clubs of Boowhang and his ape-men thundered on the closed doors and told us that their sacrifice had been completed.

"Now Oth, the high priest, who had kept by the side of Exitl throughout all this bloody tumult, lifted his hands and gave thanks to the great God for our deliverance; and then stood stilent, gazing at the doors, that were trembling under the blows of Boowhang and his ape-men. A moment he stood thus, while the lines on his aged face saddened and hardened, then he turned to Exitl.

"The last sun has risen on Tollan," he said. "The race of the Toltec is no more. We alone are left to mourn the fall of a mighty people. The gods so will; and we bow to the will of the gods.

But you, the glory of our womanhood, the gods have preserved for some great purpose of their own and have given you into our hands for safe keeping. We accept the trust. Now,' and again he glanced toward the doors, 'we must seek a safer place. Come, I will take you to the sanctuary prepared of old, possibly for this very day,' and he led the way to a secret passageway that ran from the Gold Temple to the interior of the Great Pyramid.

"An hour later and Exitl and all who were with her were safe in the Great Pyramid.

"When the sun rose on Tollan that morning, it shone on three million prosperous and happy people. When it sat at night, all were dead, save Exitl and the two hundred who came with her." Ith's voice broke and he paused a moment, overcome by his emotions. In his mind he was again witnessing the death of his people.

All at the table had sat silent, during the telling of this terrible tale of Boowhang and his dreadful revenge; and, when Ith paused, the tears were running down the cheeks of tender-hearted Loretta and even Cowboy Jim gulped once or twice.

"All that happened," Ith continued, again getting his voice under control, "a little over a year ago. Since that time Boowhang, the beast, and his ape-men have beleaguered the Great Pyramid so closely that it was death to venture outside the protection of its walls; but they could not break in. One by one men have ventured out at night

time, in hopes of securing food and getting safely back, for well we knew that our end would come with the ending of the supply of food stored in the Great Pyramid, if it were not replenished. A hundred men thus went forth; and not one of them came back.

"Oth, my father, the high priest, studied the sacred ancient books of my people. In one of them he found the story of the broken Cartouch of Quetzalcoatl, the founding of Tollan and how her fate was bound up in the broken halves of the cartouch; and, with the musty manuscript telling this strange tale, he found the half of the cartouch left in Tollan. Then Oth, my father, gave Eth, my brother, who was older than I, the half of the cartouch and revealed to him the long guarded secret of the passageway under the Mountains of Nor, through the Great Jaws of Death and the dread Snake Caverns of Ooze, to the ancient city of Tor, where, in the old time, before the great battle of the red demons, when the great Mountains of Nor were thrown up and rivers of fire ran over the land, dwelt our people. He bade him take the half of the broken cartouch and go with it to that deserted city and there await the coming of Quetzalcoatl, the god. All this he did, as was commanded to be done in the sacred books, when the day of all evil came to Tollan.

"Eth went; but returned not; and, after a year had gone since his going and the food stored in the Great Pyramid was almost exhausted, Oth, my

father, revealed the secret to me and sent me to the dead city of Tor to bring back word of my brother; and, if he were dead, he bade me await there the coming of Quetzalcoatl, or his messenger; for surely now was the fulness of time. Six days was I to await there; and, on the seventh day, I was to return, if Quetzalcoatl came not; for, on that day, Exitl was to wed Boowhang, the beast, in the great assembly chamber, if the god came not by the setting of the sun; and all the rest of us Toltecs were to go free and unharmed of the ape-men. This dread and terrible bargain Exitl compelled us to make with Boowhang, the beast, declaring that it was better for one woman to perish and, in perishing, give life to a hundred men, than, for all, the woman and the men, to die. She vowed that, if we did not yield to her in this, she would surrender herself voluntarily to Boowhang, the beast, and thus purchase our lives. We agreed to prevent Exitl from doing this mad thing; but think not so meanly of our manhood that we intended to abide by the agreement. For, among ourselves, we men had vowed that, before we would permit Boowhang, the beast, to lay hand on Exitl, the glorious, we would slay her with our own hands and then hurl ourselves upon Boowhang and his ape-men and perish.

"I found my brother dead and the half of the cartouch he carried gone; and, according to the commands of my father, I waited. On the morning of the seventh day, when I was about to start

back to Tollan, you came, bringing the two halves of the Cartouch of Quetzalcoatl and fulfilling the prophecy of his coming.

"You reached the great assembly chamber just in time; for the sun was setting and Boowhang, the beast, had stepped forward to claim his bride, when you entered.

"Thus, my lord, in telling the dreadful tale of Boowhang, the beast, and of his mad love and awful revenge, have I answered your three questions, as to how this great city came into possession of the ape-men and what has become of her people and why Exitl is the only woman left living in all Tollan," and Ith paused and waited for the others to finish with their eating; for all had been too interested in the tale to do much eating while it was in the telling.



WARNINGS

"**N**OW, if you are through with your eating, we will go out on the summit of the Great Pyramid, where Exitl and Oth, my father, await us," Ith said, when he saw that our friends had finished their breakfast; "for we would show you the still beautiful and glorious White City of Tollan from its top."

Professor Kendal's face lighted at the mention of Exitl and he at once rose from the table and signified that he was ready to go. The others promptly followed his example, glad to do something to take their minds off the dreadful scenes the tale of Ith had conjured up in their minds.

Ith at once led the way out on top of the Great Pyramid, which had been transformed into a beautiful garden, with four great buildings rising from its four corners and one, with an enormous dome, from its center. Beautiful trees and shrubbery and many-hued flowers grew here; and fountains played and brooklets ran hither and thither.

By the side of one of these fountains and under-

neath a great tree near the east side of the pyramid stood Exitl and Oth stood by her side.

Professor Kendal walked straight to the side of Exitl, his love shining in his eyes; and she, unafraid and unashamed, welcomed him with an answering look of love.

Oth stood a little apart, looking far off over the great white city below them, an expression of awe and wonder on his face, as if a great thought had just enlightened his soul.

"See," he said, after the greetings were over, pointing far eastward to the lake that steamed and the lake that was yellow with brimstone. "The red demons are making ready for a great battle. Never before in the history of Tollan has the lake that steamed spouted hot water high into the air. Look!"

All turned and looked in the direction of his pointing finger; and saw a huge column of hot water, black with mud, spout up from the center of the lake, high into the air. At the same time they heard a low rumbling sound, like very distant and very heavy thunder and felt a slight tremor shake the enormous pyramid under their feet.

The tall form of Oth now began to dilate, then to tremble; his alabaster-like cheeks flushed, then paled; his eyes shone like two burning coals and he threw back his head and stood as if the fires of youth were again coursing through his veins.

"God's voice is mine!" he cried, in a high voice.

"I prophesy! I prophesy! The last sun has shone on Tollan. This day is the day of the end. The great earth itself shakes with horror. It is the end, the end of Tollan. I prophesy! I prophesy! Rivers of fires shall flow. Mountains shall be cast down and thrown up. Tollan, the beautiful, the great white city of the mountain-rimmed valley shall be completely destroyed. Not a vestige of the city or the people shall remain. The cataclysm shall be complete."

He paused. The look of ecstasy went from his face, the fire from his eyes. His tall form seemed to shrink visibly. A look of ineffable content came on his face.

"The gods so will," he said softly; "and what the gods will man does. I am content." The alabaster whiteness of his face deepened and a feeble fire flamed up in his eyes. "My work is done. Farewell, my children. May God bless and protect you," his eyes were on the face of Exitl, as he spoke; "and give you many happy and prosperous years," and, like an utterly tired worker, he sank down on a marble bench underneath the tree and, with a soft sigh, closed his eyes and lay still.

Ith bent quickly over him for a moment; and then straightened up.

"The soul of my father, the high priest, has taken the long journey," he said quietly. "Peace go with it. Now must I see that his bones are placed by the side of the bones of his fathers. There will be no public funeral. Exitl," and he

turned to the glorious young woman standing by the side of Professor Kendal, "will show you the wonderful white city of Tollan; and, if my father spoke true words, it will be the last time mortal eyes shall look upon the glory of the Toltecs." He turned and clapped his hands loudly three times.

Two ape-men servants appeared; and, at Ith's bidding, softly lifted the still form from the marble bench and bore it gently away.

A moment all stood reverently, with heads bowed. Then, with the passing of the dead, Exitl lifted her face.

"It is well with Oth," she said. "Nobly and faithfully has he done his work through a long and sorely tried life; and now he has gone to his reward. Let us rejoice, rather than mourn," and she forced back the tears that were beginning to glisten in her eyes. "Come," she continued, "I will now do Ith's bidding and show you one of the most wonderful sights ever seen by the eyes of man," and, with Professor Kendal walking by her side, she led the way into the great dome-like building that rose from the center of the top of the Great Pyramid.

"A balloon, a monstrous big balloon!" almost shouted Dick, so great was his surprise, the moment they were inside the one large room of the building.

Dick was right; for, straining at the many ropes that held it to the floor of the building and with a great cable passing from the center of its car-

like basket through a hole in the floor, floated an enormous inflated balloon.

"The work of Professor James," and Exitl smiled at the surprise and excitement pictured on each face, "the American who fell from the skies in a machine that floats, called a balloon and who taught Oth and Ith and me and some others your language. He had built it, hoping to get back to your great country, the United States of America; but was taken sick and died a few days after the completion of the balloon. That was five years ago; and, at that time he had lived with us for ten years. Since his death we have used the balloon for observation purposes. It is fastened to a great cable, which permits it to ascend to the height of five hundred of your feet above the top of the Great Pyramid. From that height you can see the entire Valley of Tollan and the beautiful city of Tollan lies in all its white beauty beneath you.

"If my lord and my lord's friends will be so kind as to step into the observation car, we will ascend," and Exitl opened the door of the great round metal basket, large enough to comfortably seat a dozen people. "The car is made of Oxtl, the metal that has so aroused the wonder and interest of yourselves, as it likewise did that of Professor James; but the metal has been rendered opaque in all parts, save those we wish to use for observation," and she held open the door for the others to enter.

As soon as all were entered and had seated them-

selves, Exitl herself stepped into the car and pressed a lever that projected waist-high from the center of the car.

Instantly some mysterious force released all the retaining ropes, save the large cable, the dome of the building opened outward, like the petals of a great flower, and the balloon floated softly yet swiftly upward and came to rest at the end of the cable five hundred feet above the top of the Great Pyramid. There was no wind and the balloon hung there almost motionless.

Exclamations of astonishment came from Dick and Harry and Loretta and the faces of the men showed how deeply moved they were by the glorious panorama on which their eyes rested. Below them, visible in all its length and width, lay the beautiful valley of mountain-rimmed Tollan and the still more beautiful and wonderful white city of the Toltecs. Long they looked; and the longer they looked the greater their wonder grew that people who could build such a wonderful city and accomplish the mighty architectural and engineering feats they saw evidenced throughout the valley, could be so simple as to permit themselves to be completely destroyed by such a race of half-brutes as the ape-men, because of religious or any other scruples against taking life, even in defense of life, because they believed it wrong to shed blood. And yet there was something truly heroic in a whole nation perishing for a principle, however wrong the principle itself might be.

Thus, possibly, an hour passed, while our friends looked and wondered and Exitl described and explained the wonderful scene below them and told briefly the history of Tollan. And, as they looked and Exitl spoke, the great columns of hot water that spouted up from the center of the lake that steamed, seemed to increase in violence and frequency; and a thick yellow smoke began to rise from the surface of the lake that was yellow with brimstone; and deep rumbling sounds, as of mighty mountains groaning in travail, came to their ears; and a feeling of awe and dreadful apprehension began to take possession of their souls.

"My lord, let us return and quickly," Exitl exclaimed. "Never before has Tollan behaved thus; and I would be with Ith, who is wise in the ways of Tollan; for a great fear has entered my soul. Yet," and she lifted her eyes trustingly to the face of Professor Kendal, "whatever danger threatens, I would be by the side of my lord."

"We will return at once," and Professor Kendal's face whitened as he spoke; for, at that moment, cries of horror and of deadly fear came from the Great Pyramid; and, looking downward, they saw a number of Toltecs fleeing from ape-men along the great walk that wound its way upward, from the bottom to the top, around the outside of the Great Pyramid.

"The ape-men have broken into the Great Pyramid!" cried Exitl. "Now, indeed, has the end of Tollan come! But," and the eyes she turned to

Professor Kendal flamed, "we will meet it bravely, as man and woman should, you and I together, my lord."

"Yes, bravely we will face whatever comes," and an answering flame came into Professor Kendal's eyes. "Yes, and should the end be death, yet will I rejoice, for I have looked into your eyes and seen love there."

For a moment the two great souls stood looking into each other's eyes, then, without a word, Exitl turned and pushed the lever and the great balloon began to descend. And, even as they descended, there came a tremendous explosion and they saw a great mass of yellow and blue and red flames leap high above the lake that was yellow with brimstone and a great tremor and trembling came up the cable that was pulling them down.



CHAPTER XXV

A GREAT FIGHT

WHEN the balloon reached its resting place within the dome-like building they found that the two ape-servants they had left there had fled.

"Do not stop to fasten the smaller ropes," Exitl cried. "The great cable will hold the balloon. We must stop the ape-men before they reach the top of the Pyramid, or all is lost. Now, let my lord and my lord's friends speak with the weapons that thunder and kill from afar; for that is the only language the ape-men will listen to," and she darted toward the door; but Professor Kendal had caught her and pulled her back and stood her behind him.

"Quick!" and he turned to Captain Kent and Abel Johnson and Cowboy Jim, "fall in line with me. Loretta, take your place by the side of Exitl. Dick and Harry, you and Bill Burke and Chin Chink guard the women and the rear. Draw your weapons. Come," and, followed closely by Exitl and Loretta, with Dick and Harry by their sides and Bill Burke and Chin Chink following close behind them, Professor Kendal, with Captain Kent and Cowboy Jim and Abel Johnson by his side,

sprang through the door and out on the top of the Great Pyramid.

"Straight ahead," cried Exitl. "There is but one entrance to the top of the pyramid from the great walk outside and that lies straight ahead."

There was no need of further direction; for at that moment, a number of Toltecs sprang into view, from a depression in the edge of the side of the pyramid in front of them. At their head ran Ith.

"Back! Back!" he cried, the moment he caught sight of them. "The earthquake opened a way into the Great Pyramid and the ape-men are close behind us."

But Professor Kendal and the others heeded not his warning and ran on swiftly toward the spot whence the Toltecs still continued to pour up on top of the pyramid. They were just in time; for, as they reached the place, the head and shoulders of an ape-man appeared and the great hairy arms reached out and seized the hindmost Toltec and jerked him back. At that instant Professor Kendal and Captain Kent both fired; and the ape-man, with the Toltec still in his grasp fell backward and disappeared. But in his place instantly appeared the heads of three other ape-men.

"Keep cool. Make every shot tell," commanded Professor Kendal, as again he fired; and with him fired Cowboy Jim and Abel Johnson.

The three hideous brutes, with hoarse cries of rage and pain, threw up their hands and plunged backward.

Fortunately the outside stairway, giving entrance to the top of the pyramid, was narrow, so that only three ape-men could mount abreast; but, unfortunately, as it will be remembered, our friends were armed only with their revolvers and knives and had only a few rounds of ammunition with them. Their rifles and the rest of their ammunition they had left in their rooms, when they had gone to breakfast.

"Abel Johnson, Cowboy Jim and I will take the first three to appear," Professor Kendal called as the three ape-men plunged backward. "Captain Kent and Dick and Harry stand ready for the next three. Loretta, reserve your fire for emergencies. Shoot in this order as fast as they appear and make every shot kill. We must not waste two bullets on one ape-man."

During these words Professor Kendal and the others had been cautiously approaching the entrance to the stairway; for since the plunge backward of the three ape-men, with bullet holes in their heads, no other beast-head had appeared. Evidently from the hoarse guttural bark-like sounds that came from below, they were examining their fallen comrades and the mysterious wounds that had so suddenly caused their deaths; and, while they were doing this, Professor Kendal wished to get as close as possible with his men, so that they would not waste a shot. They were almost to the first step of the stairs, when roars of

rage, coming up from below, told them that the battle was on again.

"Keep cool and be sure not to waste a shot," Professor Kendal called. "Don't let one of them get on the top. We must keep them down or we are lost. Here they come!"

The three revolvers cracked; and the three ape-men that had appeared tumbled backward down the stairs on top of the others, who crowded up behind them.

"Up to the head of the stairway and clear the stairs," commanded Professor Kendal, as he saw the ape-men hesitate, terrified by the death that seemed to flame out of the white man's hands.

All sprang to the stairway, which ran straight downward for perhaps twenty-five feet before it opened on the great walk; and began shooting as fast as they could pull triggers into the mass of huge brutes crowding up the narrow stairs and only a few feet away.

For a minute the ape-men pressed on in spite of their deadly fusillade, treading on and jumping over the dead bodies as they fell and uttering horrible cries of rage; and then they suddenly turned, those of them who were left, and fled down the stairs and around the corner of the great walk, out of the reach of those deadly weapons that flamed and killed without touching.

Dick and Harry and Loretta and Cowboy Jim started to cheer; but Professor Kendal stopped them with a peremptory: "Shut up. There is no

time for cheering. Examine your weapons and tell me how many shots you have left."

All, with a great dread clutching at their hearts, quickly examined their six-shooters and their cartridge belts. Altogether they had left only fifty-seven cartridges! And when these were fired there remained only their knives to defend themselves against monsters, with the strength of ten men in each of their great bodies.

"We must get our rifles and the rest of our ammunition at once," Professor Kendal declared, the moment the result was announced. "Ith," he shouted to the Toltec, who with the few remaining Toltecs was standing a couple of rods away, where they had watched the battle with wide-distended eyes and whitening faces, "have each one of us guided to the room he occupied last night as quickly as the good God will let you. We must get our other weapons and ammunition. Hurry!"

"This way, my lord. I will show you the way," and Ith, quick to see the terrible necessity for rapid action, started on the run toward the beautiful white building that stood at the southeast corner of the Great Pyramid some thirty yards away.

Professor Kendal and our friends at once started to follow him; but, hardly had they taken half a dozen steps, when the door of the building burst suddenly open and a couple of terrified Toltecs plunged out and behind them poured out on the top of the pyramid a stream of ape-men, with Whang raging at their head. At the same moment the

monsters again charged up the outer stairway that led from the great walk to the top of the pyramid.

Death, a horrible death from which there seemed no escape, faced them.

"Keep together and let every shot kill," shouted Professor Kendal, as his eyes swept swiftly around, searching for some place that could be defended.

"Promise me, my little one," and Exitl bent close and whispered in the ear of Loretta. "Promise me that you will keep two of the bullets in that weapon of yours, one for me and one for you. Better that than the beast-men."

Loretta's eyes widened; but she understood.

"I promise," she said, her lips coming together tightly.

"Back! Back! Fall back to the dome building," shouted Professor Kendal. "It is our only refuge. Look out! They are coming!"

At that moment Whang, son of Boowhang, the beast, caught sight of Exitl standing behind Professor Kendal; and, with a bellow of triumph and rage, he whirled his bloody club around his head and charged straight down upon Professor Kendal.

Then the few remaining Toltecs, led by Ith, performed a great and brave deed. Weaponless as they were and hopeless of struggling successfully with the monsters, they yet threw themselves, shouting bravely as they went, between Professor Kendal and Whang and his charging ape-men and met their furious charge with defenseless breasts. There could be but one outcome to such an unequal

struggle. Inside of a minute all were dead, crushed and torn by the great clubs and the claw-like hands of the beast-men and pierced by their long spears, all save Ith, who, somehow, had managed to escape. But, brief as was the delay of Whang and the ape-men by this heroic sacrifice, it was long enough to enable Professor Kendal and those with him to reach the door of the dome building.

"In with you," shouted Professor Kendal, as he pushed open the great door and shoved Exitl and Loretta within and then turned to see if aid could yet be given to the Toltecs.

Ith was still on his feet and, at that instant, he tore himself loose from the grip of a huge ape-man and leaped backward just in time to avoid the swing of his great club.

"Fire! Save Ith!" shouted Professor Kendal. "Drive the brutes back with our bullets," and again all began shooting as fast as they could pull triggers.

In a moment a dozen ape-men were down, howling horribly as they fell.

"Here! Here, Ith! Quick!" shouted Professor Kendal. "We can keep them back with our bullets for a moment."

Ith turned and sprang toward the door; but, even as he sprang, an arrow struck him in the side and he staggered; and, with a yell of triumph, a great brute leaped toward him, club raised ready to strike. But the club never fell; for, at that

instant, Professor Kendal fired and the beast crumpled up and fell to the floor.

"Hold them back," shouted Professor Kendal, as he and Captain Kent, swift and sure as mountain lions, sprang to the rescue of Ith, who was still on his feet but staggering woefully.

"Bear him to safety. I will hold them back until you reach the door," and Captain Kent, a revolver in each hand, sprang between Ith and the oncoming ape-men, just as Professor Kendal caught the wounded Toltec up in his great arms and leaped back with him toward the door.

Then was seen an exhibition of wonderful revolver shooting that few men could equal under any circumstances and still fewer under the dreadful situation that confronted Captain Kent. He did not seem to take any aim, so rapidly did he shoot; and yet the ape-men fell before him, as if death were there swinging his scythe. And still more wonderful, while doing this marvelous shooting, he was jumping from side to side, dodging the arrows and spears shot and thrown at him. In less than so many seconds he had fired the twelve shots in his two revolvers and twelve ape-men lay dead on the floor, some of them almost within club reach of where he stood.

The ape-men stopped aghast by this sudden and dreadful slaughter; and, before they had recovered their courage, Captain Kent whirled about and leaped back to the door of the dome building.

"Inside and close the door," commanded Pro-

fessor Kendal, as Captain Kent reached the open door.

In a moment all were inside and the door closed; but a glance showed that the door had not been built to withstand a siege.

"How many shots have we left now?" called Professor Kendal.

Captain Kent held up his empty revolvers.

"One," cried Dick.

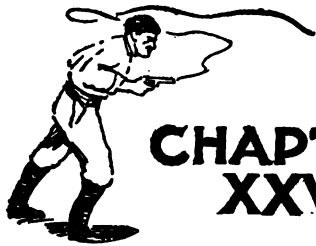
"Two," replied Harry, after hastily running his fingers over his empty cartridge belt.

"None," and Cowboy Jim swore.

"One," Abel Johnson looked at Loretta, a great dread in his eyes.

"Two, one for Exitl and one for me," Loretta answered, firm-lipped and white-faced.

At that moment the great clubs of the ape-men crashed on the door.



CHAPTER XXVI



THE FIGHT IN THE DOME BUILDING

"**S**ELL your lives as dearly as possible," Professor Kendal said grimly, his eyes on the door, now trembling beneath the blows of the apemen. Then a great calm swept over his face, as all hope of escape left him; and he turned and, stepping to where Exitl was bending over Ith, who had fainted, he picked her up in his arms.

"There is no need to help Ith now," he said. "We will all be dead in a moment," and he pressed a kiss, sacred to their love, on her lips. For a moment lips clung to lips, as if each were drinking in the life of the other; then, with his left arm still around Exitl, both turned and, clear-eyed and calm, faced the door.

A club crashed through the door and the face of a horribly grinning ape-man appeared in the opening thus made.

Dick fired his last shot; and, with a yell of agony, the hideous face disappeared.

The next moment another club smashed through the trembling door. The end was very near now.

Exitl bent and whispered to Loretta. Loretta nodded and lifted the revolver she held in her right hand and rested the barrel across the palm of her left hand.

Abel Johnson bent over Loretta, pressed a kiss on her forehead, whispered a low word of endearment in her ear and turned a stern face toward the door.

Cowboy Jim, a curiously twisted smile on his face, bared knife in one hand, stood half-crouched, staring out of fixed eyes at the door.

Captain Kent, knife in his right hand, empty revolver in his left, faced the door, his left leg thrust forward, his body slightly crouched, ready to spring the moment the door gave way. He wanted his end to come swiftly.

Bill Burke stood, head lowered, forehead wrinkled, eyes rolling wildly and fixed on the splintering door. Evidently he intended to hurl that woolly head into the stomach of the first ape-man through the door.

Chin Chink faced the door, an ugly knife in his right hand and a stoical look of calm acceptance of his fate on his face.

The door now shook and quivered and splintered under the blows of the great clubs. A hinge gave way. The ape-men yelled in triumph and hurled themselves in a body against the door.

At that moment Harry chanced to turn and look back, where the great balloon hung tugging at the cable. For an instant he stood staring open-

THE FIGHT IN THE DOME BUILDING 311

mouthed at the balloon, then, with a glad shout, he whirled around.

"The balloon! The balloon!" he yelled. "We can escape in the balloon!"

In the dreadful and terrible excitement and the swift action that had followed the attack of the ape-men, all thoughts of the balloon had been driven out of their heads; and, not until Harry's cry, did they realize that it offered them the possibility of escape; and then they acted with all possible swiftness. There was need; for, as Harry yelled, the door crashed inward and the ape-men rushed in.

"Into the balloon!" Professor Kendal shouted. "All of you. I will hold back the beasts. My guns are still loaded," and, with the last word, he leaped in front of the door of the car of the balloon, whirled about and faced the ape-men, a flaming revolver in each hand.

Fortunately, in their hasty exit, they had left the door of the car open; and, in an incredible short time, all, Captain Kent carrying the insensible Ith with him, except Professor Kendal and Dick were inside. Dick, who was about to enter, had turned at the door to tell Professor Kendal that all were safely inside——

During these brief moments Professor Kendal's bullets had tumbled the ape-men, one on top of the other, as fast as they had advanced; but, as Dick turned and called, he fired his last cartridge.

Whang, who had cunningly kept behind his men

until he saw that Professor Kendal's hands no longer flamed death, now leaped, with a dreadful yell of triumph, toward him, his ugly face distorted with rage and the lust of blood.

At the same instant Professor Kendal, hearing Dick's call, whirled about and sprang for the door of the car, his back to Whang. But he was the fraction of a second too late. The long arm of Whang shot out and the great hand gripped him by the shoulder and jerked him backward.

Professor Kendal was a huge man, almost a giant, and possessed of extraordinary strength even for so large a man; but Whang, the beast-man was more than human in size and strength and only Professor Kendal's superior skill and agility saved him from immediate death at the great hands. He managed to whirl about and draw his knife, now his only weapon; but, before he could strike, Whang seized his knife-hand and, throwing his great right arm around him, attempted to draw him to his breast so that he could sink his fang-like teeth into his throat.

Thus they stood, swaying and bending, growling and panting, Professor Kendal striving to keep that hideous mouth from his throat, yet feeling himself drawn closer and closer each moment and utterly unable to free himself from the terrible arm encircling his body.

Loretta screamed. Exitl stood, her hand on the starting lever, her face white as new-drawn milk

THE FIGHT IN THE_DOME BUILDING 313

and her eyes, big and round, staring at the dreadful struggle.

Captain Kent and the men inside the car all leaped to Professor Kendal's aid. But they were too late; for, as they reached the door, the great hairy mouth of Whang approached the throat of Professor Kendal, despite his utmost efforts, and the dog-like teeth——

Dick had seen Professor Kendal's deadly peril; and, although he appeared to be leaping to certain death, the brave boy had sprung to his aid; and now, just as the monster's jaws were about to close on Professor Kendal's throat, he drove his knife, with all the strength of his vigorous right arm, into the left side of Whang under his uplifted arm.

The monster, at the sharp pain of the knife, uttered a horrible cry, jerked back his head and loosened his grip on Professor Kendal for an instant.

But that instant was enough. Professor Kendal wrenched himself loose, sprang back a pace; and, before the wounded ape-man could stay him, drove his knife clear to the haft into the hairy breast, and, leaving the knife there, leaped back.

"Into the car! Quick!" and, with Dick a jump ahead, Professor Kendal sprang through the door of the car and shoved it shut, just as the ape-men, who had stood staring, as if fascinated, during the struggle between Whang, their king, and Professor Kendal, came to their senses and leaped after him.

The instant Professor Kendal was in the car, Exitl shoved the starting lever, the great dome opened and the balloon shot upward, to the utter amazement of the ape-men, who stood staring at it with mouths agape.

In a short time the balloon reached the end of the cable and hung there almost motionless; and, for the present at least, all were safe from the dreadful clutches of the ape-men.



CHAPTER XXVII

THE DEATH OF ITH

THE moment the balloon came to a rest, Professor Kendal stepped to the side of Exitl, a great hope shining in his eyes.

"Can you release the balloon from the hold of the cable?" he asked.

"What is it that my lord would do?" and a startled look came on Exitl's face.

"We have but one hope left," Professor Kendal answered. "If we can free the balloon from the hold of the cable, we may float over these surrounding mountains; and, if fortune favors us, land at some spot, from which we can make our way to human beings and safety."

"That is a great and daring thought, my lord," Exitl answered. "But, alas! I know of no way of breaking the hold of the cable."

"It must be broken," and Professor Kendal's jaws came together with an audible snap; "or else we have escaped from one horror, only to perish by another," and seizing Chin Chink's hunting-knife, his own it will be remembered had been left sticking in the hairy breast of Whang, he flung

himself down on his knees on the bottom of the car and endeavored to discover how the cable was fastened to the car. But the smooth hard floor, composed of a solid sheet of that wonderful metal, Oxtl, resisted all his efforts. He could not even scratch it with the point of the heavy hunting-knife.

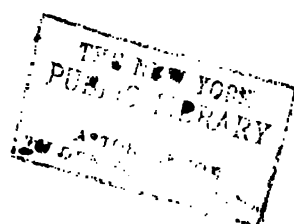
"Oxtl is very hard and the bottom of the car has been made extra strong," Exitl explained; "and, if my lord reached the cable, he could neither cut it nor unfasten it with the tools he has. I——"

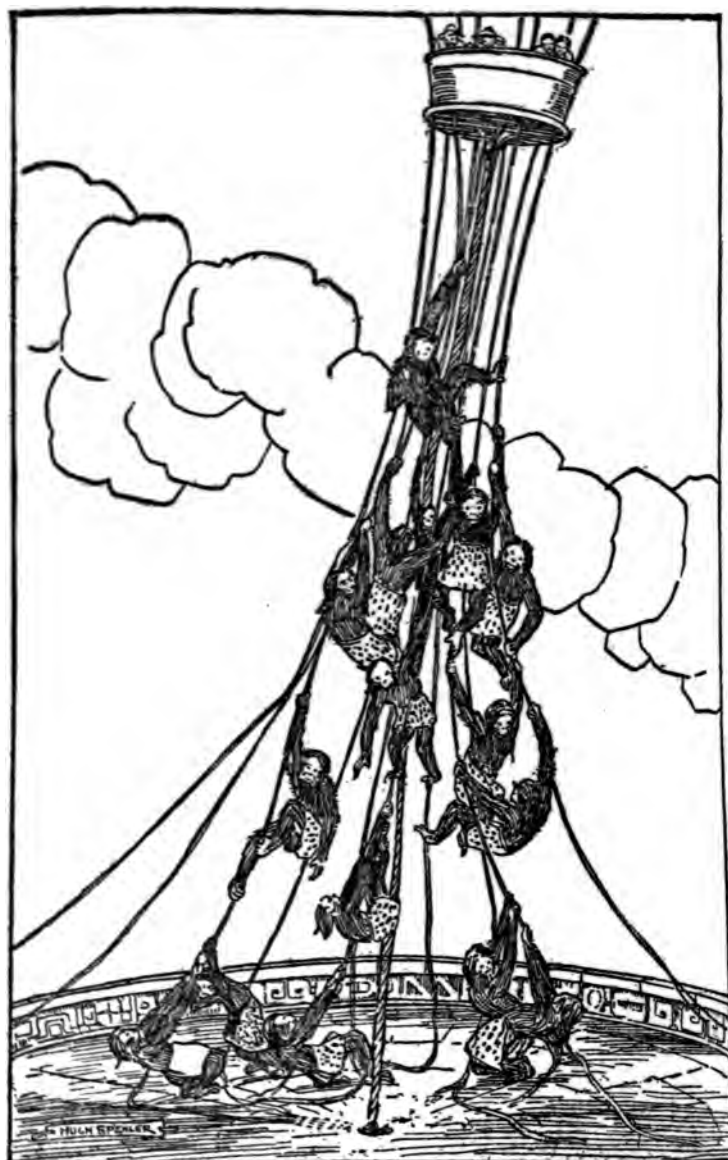
"Look there! Look there!" Dick broke in excitedly, pointing off in the direction of the lake that was yellow with brimstone. "The world is catching fire!"

Professor Kendal jumped to his feet and all looked in the direction the excited boy was pointing; and saw, flowing from the lake, a weird stream of liquid fire that was swiftly spreading over the beautiful valley; and, even as they looked, a great crack opened in the solid earth; and they could hear the crash of falling buildings and felt the tremor that shook the earth trembling through the cable.

"Even as Oth, the high priest, prophesied," Exitl said solemnly. "The greatness of Tollan shall go down in a blaze of glory."

At that moment they felt a violent tug at the balloon and heard a great shout from the ape-men below; and, startled, they looked down to see what new devilment the beasts were up to now.





SO GREAT WAS THE WEIGHT AND STRENGTH OF THE APE-MEN, THAT THE
MONSTERS WERE ABLE TO PULL THE BALLOON DOWN SLOWLY

The sight they saw sent a chill of dread to their hearts and drove all thoughts of the spectacle nature was preparing for their eyes out of their heads. The ape-men had recovered from the astonishment caused by seeing our friends go floating upward in the air out of their very clutch; and now had seized hold of the cable, all who could get their hands on it, and were endeavoring to pull the balloon down.

"God help us!" cried Abel Johnson aghast. "They are pulling the balloon down!"

It was true; for so great was the weight and the strength of the ape-men and so heavy the load carried by the balloon, that the monsters were able to pull the balloon down slowly by its cable.

"God in heaven!" cried Professor Kendal, a look of despair coming on his face. "We must break loose from that cable," and again he sprang down on the floor and began hacking away at it with the heavy hunting-knife he had borrowed from Chin Chink; and, by his side, sprang the other men, hunting-knives in hands.

But the floor was adamant. Their utmost efforts could not make the slightest impression on it; and, at last, they were compelled to give it up.

By this time the ape-men had drawn the balloon half-way down to them and were wild with excitement, yelling like fiends, as they pulled on the heavy cable.

Our friends were helpless and fast becoming hopeless. They could not do a thing to stay that

steady downward pull. They stood looking down, fascinated by the horror they were slowly approaching.

Professor Kendal, standing by the side of Exitl, placed an arm around her.

"I am content," he whispered, "I have met you. The world can offer me no greater joy."

"As my lord thinks, so think I," Exitl answered back softly. "Our souls will take the Long Journey together. What more could we ask?"

"Out with your knives," suddenly called Captain Kent. "A minute more and we will be within their reach. We must keep them off as long as possible. Something might yet happen to free us from their clutches."

And something did happen; for, just as the car came within hand-reach of the ape-men and a dozen of the beasts sprang to seize it, there came a blinding flash of light, a deafening roar, the Great Pyramid rocked and trembled and burst asunder with a mighty crash; and the balloon suddenly shot upward again with five hundred feet of the cable dangling below it.

That dreadful earth convulsion had shattered the mighty pyramid and had freed the cable from its moorings.

Up, up, high above that fearful and awful spectacle below them, shot the balloon.

The whole valley now seemed to spout fire. Enormous cracks opened in the earth, swallowing up everything that had been on the surface; and

rivers of fire flowed in all directions. Great rocks were tossed high into the air. Mountains were thrown up and cast down. And then, with a deafening roar, out from one of the enormous cracks, burst a great flood of water, that began rapidly filling up the valley. Explosion after explosion followed, as the water poured over the hot rocks and the rivers of fire.

Two hours later, from a great height in the sky, where the balloon hung almost motionless, there being no wind, our friends looked down on a mountain lake, that filled the Valley of Tollan and flowed over the spot where once the glorious white city of the Toltecs rose in all its beauty and splendor.

Ith, under the tender administrations of Exitl and Loretta, who had stopped the flow of blood and bound up the wound, had now recovered his senses and lay on an improvised bed that had been made on the seats that encircled the interior of the car, a look on his face that told that his soul was about to take the Long Journey. Exitl sat by his side, holding one of his hands and with the soft palm of the other hand resting on his forehead. The others had gathered near, their faces showing how deeply moved they were, anxious to hear the last words of this, the last man of a once great and glorious race.

For some time Ith had lain with closed eyes, a little spot of red coming and going on his almost transparent cheeks. Now he opened his eyes and looked up into the faces around him.

"Do we still float above the lake that now, you say, marks the site of the once glorious White City of Tollan?" he asked, his voice weak, but clear and distinct.

"We do," Professor Kendal answered, a slight tremor in his voice. "There is still no wind and the balloon hangs almost motionless."

"Promise me," and the flush deepened in the transparent cheeks, "that, when my soul departs on the Long Journey, you will cast this worn-out body down into the lake. I would have my bones rest beneath the waters that cover Tollan."

"We promise," Professor Kendal answered solemnly.

"Now," and the light brightened in his eyes, "lift me up. I would take my last look at all that is left of Tollan."

Tenderly as a woman Professor Kendal bent and, lifting Ith up in his arms, held him so that his eyes could look down on the still tumultuous waters that filled the Valley of Tollan.

Long Ith looked.

"I see little that is familiar," he said at last. "Even the mountains have been changed. Now, lay me down; for the end is very near."

A minute he lay with his eyes closed, then he opened them and looked up into the face of Exitl, who, with tears in her eyes, was bending over him.

"Exitl, the beloved flower of all womanhood," he said softly, "you alone of all the race of the Toltecs the gods have permitted to live, for some

great purpose of their own. It is the will of the gods and what the gods do is well done. I am content. Forget not Ith and Tollan, Tollan the——”

His voice grew weaker—ceased, the eyelids closed; and the soul of Ith had started on the Long Journey.

Exitl arose and stood looking down on the still face.

“All is well with Ith,” she said softly. “He died nobly and he lived nobly. Peace go with his soul.”

Professor Kendal now bent over the body and examined it closely.

“He is dead,” he said and straightened up. “It will not be wise to delay his burial,” and, lifting the body up gently in his arms, he stepped to the edge of the car. “Thus I fulfil my pledge to Ith, now dead,” he said, and, as gently as possible, he cast the body from him into the pure depths below, and turned and stood silent, with head bowed.

Thus all stood for a couple of minutes; and, when they lifted their heads and turned, not one of them looked downward, where the distant waters had closed over Ith.



CHAPTER XXVIII

AT THE MERCY OF THE BALLOON

NOW, as if it had waited for this last rite to be performed for this last man of the Toltec race, a stiff wind began to blow that carried the balloon swiftly westward and high enough for them to pass over the tops of the mountains that rimmed in the Valley of Tollan to the westward.

Professor Kendal and Captain Kent at once made a thorough examination of the balloon. Everything appeared to be in the best of working order. Under the seats that circled the interior of the car, they found a number of bags of ballast. There was a little water, stored in a metal tank; but no food. The valve-line passed through the top of the car and hung within easy reach. A small chest contained a number of warm, feather-lined, cloak-like garments, doubtless placed there by the Toltecs to protect their bodies on cold and windy days. This was a lucky find; for the air, at the height they were, was exceedingly chilly and they were beginning to suffer greatly from the cold.

"As soon as we cross over the mountains, we will descend where the air is warmer," Professor Kendal said, as he carefully wrapped Exitl up in one of the great cloaks. "There is nothing more that we can do now—except to keep ourselves warm—and pray for a safe landing-place," he added, with a smile, as he drew one of the cloaks around his own shoulders and sat down by the side of Exitl.

The others needed no invitation to follow his example; and soon all were comfortably wrapped in their feather-lined cloaks.

Hour after hour passed; and still the mountains below them forbid all thoughts of landing. But, just as the sun began to near the western horizon, they passed over the last mountains.

Professor Kendal arose stiffly and pulled the valve-line. All waited anxiously to see if it worked. There was no perceptible change in their motion.

"Throw out something light, that will float," Professor Kendal called. "If it rises, then we are descending and the valve-line works."

Dick quickly tore off a number of feathers from the lining of his cloak and threw them overboard. They rose rapidly in the air.

"The valve works. We are descending," Professor Kendal cried joyously. "Now we must try and find a good landing-place," and he hurried to the side of the car and looked down.

They were still very high and all he could see was a great carpet of green, stretching out as far

as the eyes could reach. At first he took this to be a great level plain and rejoiced; but soon the descending balloon showed him that he was looking down on the top of an immense forest, where it would be impossible to land without endangering all their lives.

"We must get beyond this great woods before descending," and Professor Kendal cast an anxious glance toward the descending sun, that was now about to sink below the horizon; and, stepping to the valve-line, he closed the valve.

"Throw out a bag of ballast," he called to Dick. "We must stop our descent."

Dick promptly seized one of the bags of sand and emptied its contents over the side of the car.

"Over with another bag," called Professor Kendal, after noting the effects of the one just emptied. "We are still descending."

Dick emptied another bag; and all watched anxiously to see if the descent of the balloon had stopped.

They were now only a few hundred feet above the tops of the great trees. Indeed, the end of the cable, which was still attached to the balloon, was now dragging over the tree tops.

"We are not descending. We are rising," Harry cried, after a few moments' watching.

Harry was right. The balloon continued to rise for a short time; and then began to float apparently keeping the same distance from the earth.

"We will try and keep at this distance," Pro-

fessor Kendal said, his eyes fixed anxiously on the forest below them, "until we find a safe landing-place."

By this time the sun had set; and already the shadows of night were falling on the earth. Soon the forest and the earth itself disappeared under the dark shadows; and nothing anywhere, around, above or below, was visible to their eyes, save the stars shining brightly in a clear sky. There was no moon.

"Begins to look as if we would have to spend the night up here in the balloon," Professor Kendal declared, trying to speak as if it were a minor misfortune, like being caught in a heavy rain, when out on a pleasure trip, disagreeable but easily endured. "Well," and he smiled, "I have always wanted to spend a night up in a balloon, with the glorious stars above me and seemingly nothing below. It must be a wonderful experience."

But, in his own mind, Professor Kendal was far from being easy. He did not know where they were, nor in what direction they were drifting. True the wind had blown them westward when they started; but the constant turning around of the balloon had soon caused them to lose all sense of direction and prevented them from using the sun or the stars as guides. The darkness of night was full of dreadful possibilities. For all he knew they might be drifting directly toward the jagged peaks of mountains or the Pacific Ocean. Indeed, if they had continued to drift westward through

the day and should continue westward throughout the night, morning would be almost certain to find them above the Pacific Ocean. Professor Kendal shuddered at the thought of what that might mean. Such thoughts passed rapidly through Professor Kendal's mind; but he wisely said nothing to the others about his fears.

Another thing was troubling Professor Kendal very much. He had made the most astounding discovery of the ages; but all his notes, all his proofs, the city itself and even the people had been completely destroyed. There was nothing left even to show that the city of Tollan ever existed, or that the Toltecs of the Valley of Tollan ever lived, only his unprovable word and the word of those with him. Who would believe such a marvelous tale without proof? Who would believe that he had discovered a great city and a great people absolutely unknown to the rest of the world, only to have them conveniently and completely destroyed, and that in such a way as to leave no signs of their former existence? He could imagine the scorn with which his fellow archeologists, indeed, the whole scientific world, would receive such a tale, with such an ending. And yet, if he only could convince them of the truth of his remarkable tale, his reward would be very great and very dear to him.

Now, as they floated through the darkness of that wonderful night, he sat silent, debating in his mind what was best for them to do, should they

win back to civilization; and, at last, he was forced to the conclusion that it would be worse than folly for them to attempt to convince the world of the truthfulness of their marvelous experiences, that such a tale would ruin his reputation for veracity forever; and that the wisest course for them to pursue would be to say nothing whatever of their wonderful adventures; or, at the most, to publish them as a tale of fiction. No sooner did he definitely come to this decision than the troubled look was swept from his face and he turned to Exitl, who sat by his side, with a smile, and gently placed an arm around her and drew her to him.

"But, why should I complain?" he queried softly. "I have won a far greater prize than fame, or honor, or riches, the woman of my heart's choice. Let the rest go. I am content."

"My lord, what has been troubling you?" and an anxious puzzled look came on Exitl's face.

"I was foolishly thinking of other things and not of the greatness of the prize I had won in winning you, dear heart," Professor Kendal answered, with a tender look; and then, turning to the others, he requested them to give him their attention for a few minutes.

Then he explained to them the reasons why he believed it best not to make known to the world their wonderful discoveries nor to tell of their remarkable adventures.

"But, of course, we can tell our friends," Harry

demanding, loath to forego such a splendid opportunity of astonishing the boys back home.

"Certainly, if you do not mind becoming known as the biggest liar in your town," and Professor Kendal smiled.

Finally it was agreed that not a word was to be said of this strange adventure to any one, except to their most intimate friends and then only under the seal of secrecy; and each one, including Bill Burke and Chin Chink, bound himself to this agreement.

That was a wonderful ride through the mystery and silence of the dark skies. There was no moon; but the skies were clear and the stars shown brightly. Below them there was a misty mysterious blackness, that the eye could not penetrate, and above them the stars. And there they hung, floating between the blackness below and the brightness above, with silence and mystery all around them.

The night, for the most part, was spent in silence. Their minds were too busy thinking over the rapid and remarkable happenings of the past few days and wondering over what the outcome of this strange ride would be and watching the majesty of the heavens above them, to care to talk. Bill Burke and Chin Chink were the only ones who slept more than a few winks at a time.

Sometime about the middle of the night they heard a sound below them like waves beating

against rocks and all strained their eyes downward. But they could see nothing.

Professor Kendal shuddered and drew Exitl yet closer to him. Captain Kent, Abel Johnson and Cowboy Jim whispered something in a low voice. Dick and Harry and Loretta wondered what the sound meant; but, fearful of what the answer might be, did not ask. Bill Burke and Chin Chink snored.

At last morning dawned, the sun rising glorious in a misty veil of red. Anxiously their eyes sought the earth; but still they could see nothing. No wind blew; and a heavy fog lay spread out below them as far as the eyes could reach. About nine o'clock a stiff wind arose and drove off the fog; and, on all sides as far as the eyes could see, below them lay the Pacific Ocean, calm now, but with a threatening storm rising above the distant horizon and rapidly advancing in their direction.

Suddenly all, almost with the same breath, gave a great shout; for there, riding on the waves below them, but some distance away, was a steamer. At the same moment those on the ship caught sight of them, as was evident from the excitement on board.

"The gods are kind!" and Professor Kendal sprang to the valve-line and jerked it wide open. "We cannot afford to miss this opportunity and must take our chances with the water. Can everybody swim?" and he glanced anxiously around.

All answered in the affirmative.

The balloon was now a couple of thousand or more feet above the ocean; and was already beginning to descend; but, oh so slowly! it seemed to the anxious watchers.

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick, a moment later. "They are lowering a boat. They are coming to our rescue."

The wind had now died down, as it often does before a storm; and the balloon hung motionless, save for its slow descent.

The boat came swiftly toward them over the water. A man stood up in its prow and, making a trumpet out of his hands, shouted: "Get that balloon down faster, or the storm will get you before we do."

Professor Kendal whirled about and glanced anxiously toward the rapidly advancing storm. Already it had covered half the distance to them. At their present rate of descent, it would reach them long before they would be low enough to jump into the water; and it needed but a glance at the violently moving clouds to tell what their end would be, if the storm struck them while they were in the balloon.

"We must rip a hole in the gas bag, or we can never make the water in time," and Professor Kendal's eyes turned desperately upward to where the great gas bag hung above their heads, searching for a way to reach it.

A fine net-work of ropes enclosed the great bag and supported the car. There was but one way to

reach the bag and that was up one of these frail-looking ropes, a feat that seemed hardly possible of accomplishment.

Dick saw the look and understood. The great bag must be cut open or all would be almost certain to perish. His eyes glanced swiftly up the ropes. He saw that there was a possibility of making it and turned to Professor Kendal.

"Here, give me a boost on top of the car," he said. "I feel quite sure I can reach the bag."

Professor Kendal stared down at him for a moment; and then, without a word, bent and caught Dick up and held him so that he could climb on top of the car.

In a moment more Dick was on the car's top and had caught hold of one of the ropes and was climbing upward with the agility of a monkey.

The wind now began to blow and the balloon began to sway; but still Dick struggled upward. At last he reached the bag and struck it a great slashing blow with his knife, cutting a long gash in the great bag. The outpour of gas almost overcame him. For a minute he hung swaying, looking as if he would fall to certain death any moment. Then, with a great effort, he collected his senses and his strength and slid down the rope to the top of the car.

The balloon was now rapidly descending. Already the cable was dragging in the water.

"All get ready to jump and all jump at the same

time," shouted Professor Kendal. "We must leap before the car strikes the water."

"Dick, Dick, where is Dick?" cried Loretta.

"Here, here, on top of the car," answered Dick, to the relief of all. "I will jump from here."

The boat was now not two rods away from where they would land, when they jumped into the water. The wind began to blow harder. The storm was almost upon them. The car began to pitch and whirl.

"Jump!" shouted Professor Kendal, just as the car seemed about to plunge down into the water.

All jumped.

A half an hour later all stood safe and sound on board the good steamship, *Ellen Roy*, bound for San Francisco, California.

A minister chanced to be on board; and that night Professor Kendal and Exitl were married in the ship's cabin.

In due time our friends all arrived, safe and sound, in San Francisco, where, since all their adventures springing from the Cartouch of Quetzal-coatl are ended, we will make our adieus to them, only adding that before they separated to go their several ways, they renewed their pledges of secrecy and vowed that some day they would again return to the site of the lost city of Tollan.

POSTSCRIPT

POSSIBLY, BEFORE MAKING HIS ADIEUS, THE
AUTHOR SHOULD ADD THAT HE OBTAINED ALL THE

AT THE MERCY OF THE BALLOON 335

INFORMATION GIVEN IN THIS TALE DIRECT FROM HARRY ASHTON, WHO MADE HIM PROMISE TO USE THE STORY OF THEIR REMARKABLE ADVENTURES IN MEXICO ONLY IN THE FORM OF A FICTITIOUS NARRATIVE.













